



ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

Psychology

THE STUDY OF YOGA EFFECTS ON STRESS.

KEY WORDS:

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ABSTRACT

It is important for children and adolescents to be informed about the nature of yoga and the evidence of its effects to reduce stress. Thus, this research paper provides information regarding the therapeutic effects of yoga on stress among adolescents by reviewing various forms of literature which connect yoga to the reduction of stress.

INTRODUCTION

There are many different mindfulness-based exercises, such as a variation of meditations, and yoga, that teach one how to respond to stress rather than reacting to stress. Mindful meditation is a concentration on a stimuli, such as breathing, or body sensation, while focusing on one's current state of mind, in order to maintain concentration (Rahl, Lindsay, Pacilio, Brown, Creswell, 2017). While maintaining concentration, one is able to be present, open, and accepting of external experiences.

The practice of yoga produces a physiological state opposite to that of the flight-or-fight stress response and with that interruption in the stress response, a sense of balance and union between the mind and body can be achieved. According to Barnett et al. (2014), yoga is comprised of eight different practices: Yama, which allows one to engage in moral behavior; Niyama, which helps one practice healthy habits while being tolerant and observant; Asana, which focuses on the postures; Pranayama, which focuses on breathing; Pratyahara, which prepares one for meditation, while practicing sensory detachment; Dharana, the practice of deep concentration and focus on one object; and Dhyana, the practice of contemplation, and Samadhi, which is the achievement of entering supreme bliss, or achieving a higher consciousness. These techniques have been practiced for over 5,000 years and require one to reflect on what is causing the stress rather than reacting instantly to the situation bringing the stress.

From experiences in my own life, I can say, incorporating more mindfulness-based practices has confirmed to be a substantial help when working through the stressors of school and family life. When applying what was learned during my research for my psychology project on stress, I found these skills helped me cope with, and manage stress and anxiety.

According to Kranner, Minibayeva, Beckett & Seal (2010), when a threat, or stressor, is present, the body will react, create adrenaline and go into a state of alarm. When the threat is present, one will feel the emotion of stress. Anxiety is imagining the worst possible scenario, when they feel there is a threat (kidshealth.org, 2014). According to Kranner et al. (2010), stress and anxiety can be short term or long term, and can become overwhelming, and negatively impact one's life if they spend excessive amounts of time worrying about their environment. Mindfulness-based practices are well known for alleviating stress, depression and anxiety.

They are often considered a complementary or alternative form of medicine when compared to Western medicine (Ciesla, Reilly, Dickson, Emanuel, & Updegraff, 2012).

Exposure to stress in life is something that cannot be avoided. Children are said to have at least one exposure to a major life

event that causes stress by the time they reach the age of 16, and even more exposure for children who live in disadvantaged neighborhoods (Ganzel, Kim, Gilmore, Tottenham, Temple, 2013). Even if the level of stress is low, it has been found stress affects task performance and causes an inability to concentrate (Kauts & Sharma, 2009). This stress affects the body in a variety of ways. Studies have shown stress affects the brain, in potentially irreversible, the stress chronic pain, academic performance, and psychosocial well-being also could affect our physical body. (Ganzel et al., 2013; Lupien, McEwen, Gunnar & Heim, 2009).

Mindfulness-based practices can help buffer stressful situations, but it has also been shown to decrease the level of stress in children's lives, along with showing a greater wellbeing (Kuyken, et al., 2013).

**Review of literature
Yoga for Stress**

Stress can also affect academic performance in young people. An experimental study conducted by Kauts and Sharma (2009) demonstrated adolescents with low levels of stress performed better on tests than adolescents with high levels of stress.

This study split the students up between experiencing high-and-low stress, and then randomly split them into an experimental group, receiving yoga, and a control group, who did not receive any treatment.

All of the students took the Bisht Battery of Stress Scale and were divided into students with low stress or high stress, based off of their scores on the scale. Half of the students in the low-stress group and half of the students in the high-stress group were put into the experimental group, and the other half from each group were put into the control group.

Study results indicated students in the experimental group performed better on the tests after treatment than the control group. This could be due to the yoga helping in managing anxiety and concentration. Students who were a part of the low-stress group performed better overall, but also showed improvement when in the experimental group. This not only shows that stress effects how you do academically, but it also shows yoga is an effective way to alleviate stress, resulting in better academic performance.

Another study found employing a mindfulness-based program, including yoga, increased resilience in children ranging in age from 6 to 12 years old, during times of intense stress (Kuyken, et al., 2013).

Children were randomly assigned to an intervention group, focused on yoga and breathing exercises, and a control group that went through the traditional curriculum at school, which

included classes such as social studies and personal and social health classes.

The results of this study showed the intervention was well liked, and taught the participants skills to use when experiencing stressors that occur in everyday life, and promoted mental health and well-being. This study showed that not only is a mindfulness-based program that includes yoga helpful for the individuals to regulate mental health, it is also widely accepted among this population.

Yoga philosophy, often simply referred to as yoga, is one of the six main darshans, or the orthodox schools of Hinduism. The origins of this philosophy are unclear, but first references can be found in the Upanishads from the 1st millennium B.C.E. Yoga is a dualist philosophy, working with two fundamental realities: purusha, meaning "pure consciousness," and prakriti, meaning "matter." Every living being is a form of connection of these two realities and every living being is considered a union of body and mind.

The path of yoga is guided by ethical principles, should ultimately result in moksha (spiritual liberation).

Yoga philosophy accepts Samkhya's theory of the three gunas - sattva, rajas and tamas - present in every living being. Sattva represents harmony and kindness; rajas represents passion and activity; and tamas represents darkness, destruction and chaos. Although present in every living being, the three gunas are found in different proportions. The theory of the three gunas is a base for yoga philosophy of the mind. Yoga philosophy believes that purusha is sattva and prakriti is tamas. They outline the values that should be followed, such as purity, self-study and contemplation of God.

Yoga philosophy is well described in "The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali," where he outlines the eight limbs, or stages, that one should follow to reach moksha. The eight limbs include the yamas and niyamas, asanas (physical practice), pranayama (breathing exercises), pratyahara (withdrawal), dharana (concentration), dhyana (meditation) and samadhi (union with God)

Methodology

This study was designed to explore how the practices of yoga help to alleviate stress in children and adolescents. In order to do this qualitative data was researched, Qualitative data focuses more on personal narratives and lived experiences, rather than numbers and counting. It also focuses on complete, idiographic explanations (Monette, Sullivan, & DeJong, 2008).

The reason for conducting qualitative research is because I would like to understand why yoga-based practices are utilized, and the outcomes they have. I would like to better understand the meaning behind yoga and what it is about yoga helps adolescents and children work through their stress. To gain a deeper insight to the world of Yoga Philosophy, my psychology teacher of grade 12, helped me add the information about its gunas, ethics and overall the concept of yoga philosophy, and how it originated and pointed me in the right direction with her notes about yoga and stress. I will forever be grateful for her help in this paper.

DISCUSSION

While modern medicine has the ability in many cases to improve psychological disorders, it is contended that a purely medical approach is less effective in reducing stress. The discipline of yoga offers individuals a timeless and holistic model of health and healing and it offers a holistic path of healing. Yoga suspends the fluctuations of the mind and by acting consciously, we live better and suffer less.

reaction to an event that is perceived as stressful or frightening. The perception of threat activates the sympathetic nervous system and triggers an acute stress response that prepares the body to fight or flee. Yoga reduces stress as the practice of yoga produces a physiological state opposite to that of the flight-or-fight stress response and with that interruption in the stress response, a sense of balance and union between the mind and body can be achieved.

stress has a negative impact on the immune system and increases vulnerability to disease and leads to physical and mental health problems such as anxiety and depression. Practicing yoga and meditation as a means to manage and relieve both acute and chronic stress helps individuals overcome other illnesses associated with diseases and leads to increased quality of life.

The fight or flight response is an automatic physiological