



YOGA AS AN ANCIENT SCIENCE OF HEALING: ITS IMPACT ON MENTAL HEALTH OF WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

Since time immemorial *Yoga* had been practiced in India. It is considered to be a means for physical, mental and spiritual growth of an entity. With increasing research evidence, *yoga* has been emerging as a powerful tool to achieve good states of health, both at physical and mental levels. Several studies have demonstrated the beneficial effects of *yoga* on the mental health of women. *Yoga* improved quality of life and sleep, provided peace of mind, and reduced depression, anxiety levels and psychological symptoms of stress-related problems, illness and insomnia, menopausal symptoms and all pains. It also helped breast cancer survivor to achieve psychological well-being. *Yoga* can be a useful tool for both physical and mental well being for women.

KEYWORDS: *Yoga*, Mental Health of Women, Psychological disorders.

INTRODUCTION

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 solace for the restless mind and can give great relief to the sickly 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 lifestyle-related somatic problems such as hypertension, bronchial asthma, diabetes including some psychiatric conditions such as anxiety neurosis and depressive illness etc.^[1]

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^[2]. Gupta *et al.*^[3] 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 relieves post traumatic stress disorder and depression^[4].

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Yoga has been used as a tool for stress management that can assist in alleviating depression and anxiety disorders, insomnia and other psychological ailments. Many studies have been done on the effect of *yoga* on mental health of women in different dimensions. *Yoga* reduced tension-anxiety, depression, anger-hostility, fatigue, confusion; anxiety, depression, and hostility significantly in healthy women. ^[5] A pilot study was done on effect of *Kripalu*-based *yoga* on women with current full or subthreshold Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms. *Yoga* practice showed reduction in reexperiencing and hyperarousal symptoms. It

was concluded that yoga may be an effective adjunctive treatment for PTSD.^[6]

There is evidence to suggest that yoga effectively reduces distress and improves certain stress-related psychological and physical outcomes in distressed women.^[7] Michalsen *et al.*^[8] showed improvements in perceived stress, State and Trait Anxiety and well-being, vigor, fatigue and depression and reported pain relief from headache or back-pain in distressed women. Long-term practice of yoga provides clear and significant health benefits in women. Participation in a single 90-minute yoga class can significantly reduce perceived stress. Doing *Hatha yoga* regularly can reduce perceived stress even more significantly.^[9]

Yoga intervention can lead to significant reduction in perceived level of anxiety in women who suffer from anxiety disorder.^[10] The *Yoga* practice not only reduced anxiety and depressive mood but also increased high-on-energy, positive well-being and total well-being among married women.^[11]

Dixon *et al.*^[12] studied effect of *Hatha yoga* on mental health of low-income women who are survivors of domestic violence and found that there is better reduction in the symptoms of depression. *Yoga* served as a self-care technique for the reduction of stress and ruminative aspects of depression and it also served as a relational technique, facilitating connectedness and shared experiences in a safe environment.^[13]

Some of the studies were done on efficacy of yoga on breast cancer patients. Yoga practice improved their mood and reduced anxiety.^[14] It increased their peace of mind and hope; and provided healthy connection to other yoga participants.^[15] *Yoga* improved their overall quality of life.^[16,17] A gentle type of yoga could be beneficial on emotional outcomes and fatigue in breast cancer patients.^[18] *Yoga* could be an important tool in the healing process in the areas of mental, physical and social life for breast cancer survivors.^[19]

Field *et al.*^[20] studied the effects of yoga on prenatal and postpartum depression and found reduction of depression, anxiety, and anger scores and improved their relationship scores.

Women who practiced yoga during late pregnancy achieved greater optimism, power, and well-being.^[21] Antenatal yoga can be beneficial for reducing women's anxieties toward childbirth and preventing increases in depressive symptoms.^[22]

Yoga can be effective in reducing insomnia^[23], menopausal symptoms and improving the quality of life.^[23,24] Integrated approach of *Yoga* therapy improved hot flushes and night sweats related to menopause. Even the short-term practice of *Yoga* can decrease both psychological and physiological risk factors for cardiovascular on menopausal women.^[25]

Yoga training improved quality of life in women with mild-to-moderate asthma and resulted in decreased parasympathetic and increased sympathetic modulation.^[26] Johnson *et al.*^[27] studied on effect of yoga on women military veterans and found decreased depression and increased energy. A study was done on the effect of yoga on older women and the result showed the long-term or frequent yoga practice increasingly protects older women from low levels of psychological well-being and increased protective effect against low levels of subjective well being and vitality.^[28]

According to objectification theorists, sexual objectification of the female body contributes to mental health problems which disproportionately affect girls and women including eating disorders and depression. The college-age women who practiced yoga found reducing levels of perceived self-objectification and increased internal bodily awareness.^[29]

Jenning *et al.* examined efficacy of yoga as a complementary therapy for smoking cessation and found that it even made them abstain from smoking and reduced anxiety. There are improvements in perceived health well-being when compared with controls.^[30] The frequent yoga practice might ameliorate the negative impact of abuse history on self-concept and coping skills. It suggested that women who incorporated yoga into other areas of life could get the greatest psychological benefits.^[31]

CONCLUSION

Many studies concluded that yoga improved the mental health of women. It showed that yoga improved quality of life, quality of sleep and provided peace of mind and reduced depression, anxiety scores and psychological symptoms of stress related problems, illness and insomnia, menopausal symptoms. It also helped breast cancer survivor to achieve psychological well being. Though there were certain limitations, these studies have shown the benefit of yoga on mental health of women. Yoga can be a useful tool for both physical and mental well being.

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