

# IMPACT OF YOGA NIDRA ON STUDENTS' WELLBEING

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## ABSTRACT

**INTRODUCTION** – Yoga nidra is a deep relaxation or psychic sleep using in yoga practice. It is used for eliminate stress, solve personal and interpersonal problems, resolve trauma, and neutralize and overcome anxiety, fear, anger and depression as it is a systematic method to establish harmony and wellbeing.

**OBJECTIVE** – The purpose of this trial was to evaluate the impact of yoga nidra on the wellbeing of students after acquiring and practising yoga nidra for three months period. We compared the result between the yoga nidra group and the age-matched control using Beck Depression Scale.

**METHOD** – 48 females and 19 males attended a 14 week long course where they acquired and practised yoga nidra with the help of a yoga teacher for 20-25 minutes per week. Their average age was  $20.54 \pm 0.76$ . Age-matched ( $20.02 \pm 0.54$ ) control group including 51 females and 24 males were randomly chosen. Participants completed the validated 13-item Beck Depression Scale. We used SPSS 19.0 software, the level of significance was set at  $p$  value  $\leq 0.05$ . Mann-Whitney and Wilcoxon signed ranks test were used for data analysis.

**RESULT** – There were no statistically significant differences between the yoga nidra and the control groups at baseline regarding the scale scores, but we found significant differences after 14 weeks (yoga nidra group  $2.43 \pm 2.20$  vs. control group  $4.56 \pm 3.89$ ;  $p=0.001$ ). There were significant improvement in yoga nidra group between the first and second measures (at baseline  $4.27 \pm 3.51$  vs. 14 weeks later  $2.43 \pm 2.20$ ;  $p=0.000$ ). Regarding the control group we did not observe significant differences between the two measures. Comparing the items between the two measures we observed significant improvement in mood ( $p=0.019$ ), self-dissatisfaction ( $p=0.012$ ), guilt ( $p=0.003$ ), punishment ( $p=0.033$ ), body image ( $p=0.016$ ), work difficulties ( $p=0.001$ ) and fatigue ( $p=0.000$ ). (Table 1)

**CONCLUSION** – The findings of our study suggest that practising yoga nidra improves the students' general wellbeing. Students experienced short- and long-term effect of these positive changes that encouraged them to practice this relaxation method throughout the lifetime. Yoga nidra is a simple and easy-to-practice method to improve young people's general wellbeing.

Key words: yoga nidra, relaxation, wellbeing, Beck Depression Scale

*“You cannot solve a problem with the same mind that created it.”*  
*Albert Einstein*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Yoga nidra is originated from the ancient Tantric are. It is a state of inner awareness combined with complete muscular, mental and emotional relaxation. The body is relaxed while the mind is awake. The system was constructed by Swami Satyananda Saraswati who is author of 80 over books including *Yoga Nidra*. [1] Yoga nidra is called yogic sleep, conscious sleep, sleepless sleep, dynamic sleep, psychic sleep, or deep relaxation. It can be also defined as an altered state of consciousness. Diseases with high psychosomatic component such as asthma, peptic ulcer and migraine headache respond favourably by yoga nidra. The deep relaxation technique is a tool in controlling diseases caused by tension such as hypertension and insomnia. It is used for eliminate stress, solve personal and interpersonal problems, resolve trauma, and neutralize and overcome anxiety, fear, anger and depression as it is a systematic method to establish harmony and wellbeing. [2-5]

Practice of yoga nidra is the simplest method of relaxation, which is generally being practiced in the flat lying position of ‘shavasana’ (corpse pose) and follows the spoken instruction of the yoga teacher. The subject lies supine with legs apart; arms are kept with palms facing upwards, eyes lightly closed. (Picture 1) Breathing is natural and quiet. It is also a very powerful and effective technique to achieve a total self-transformation and get rid of negativities. It does not require any belief or faith as a precondition for it to work effectively.



*Picture 1 ‘Shavasana’ pose for yoga nidra*

## **OBJECTIVE**

The purpose of this trial was to evaluate the impact of yoga nidra on the wellbeing of students after acquiring and practising yoga nidra for three month period. We compared the result between the yoga nidra group and the age-matched control by using the Beck Depression Scale.

## **METHOD**

### *Participants*

Sixty seven young people (48 females and 19 males) attended a 14 week long course in the autumn semester of the 2011/2012 academic year where they acquired and practised yoga nidra with the help of a yoga teacher. Their average age was  $20.54 \pm 0.76$ . They practiced 20-25 minutes per week lying prone position and following the spoken instruction of the teacher. After acquiring the relaxation they were asked to practice it at home as often as they can. Seventy five randomly chosen students (average age  $20.02 \pm 0.54$ ) were invited to complete the 13-item Beck Depression Scale as a control group including 51 females and 24 males. All the participants were full-time students of the University of Miskolc, Hungary. The participants were informed about the purpose and methods of the research in verbally, and written consent was obtained before the completion of study. Nobody refused to take part in the study.

### *Measure*

The Beck Depression Scale is a multiple-choice self-report inventory. It can be used for both adults and adolescents. [6] The participants completed the validated 13-item Beck Depression Scale (BDS) before and after the course. (Cronbach alfa=0.83) The BDS assesses physical and physiological symptoms of depression such as mood, pessimism, sense of failure, self-dissatisfaction, guilt, punishment, suicidal ideas, social withdrawal, ability of decision, body image, work difficulties, fatigue, and appetite. It takes about 5-8 minutes to complete. The participants rated how much problems they have had in the previous two week periods on a 4-point scale. The total score varied between 0 and 39 to estimate the intensity of subjects' depressive symptoms. The following intervals were defined to distinguish between the degree of symptom severity: normal or minimal (0-7), mild (8-12), moderate (13-17) and severe (18-39). [7-8]

At the end of the course participants reported about their experience and remarkable changes due to practicing yoga nidra in written and anonym form.

## *Statistical analysis*

Analyses were performed with SPSS 19.0 Statistical Software. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the sample characteristics. The level of significance was set at  $p$  values  $\leq 0.05$ . We compared the results of BDS between the investigated and the control groups with Mann-Whitney test at baseline and at the end of the intervention. Wilcoxon signed ranks test was used for analyzing the changes in the group practising yoga nidra.

## **RESULT**

There were no statistically significant differences between the yoga nidra and the control groups at baseline regarding the BDS (Yoga nidra group:  $4.27 \pm 3.51$  vs. control group:  $3.65 \pm 2.79$ ;  $p=0.357$ ). The most students (77.46%) were in normal range, 20.42% had mild depression, two students were supposed to have moderate and one severe depression. We found significant differences after 14 weeks between the two groups (yoga nidra group:  $2.43 \pm 2.20$  vs. control group:  $4.56 \pm 3.89$ ;  $p=0.001$ ).

There were significant improvement in yoga nidra group between the first and second BDS scores (at baseline  $4.27 \pm 3.51$  vs. 14 weeks later  $2.43 \pm 2.20$ ;  $p<0.001$ ). Regarding the control group we did not observe significant differences between the two measures.

Comparing the items between the two measures we observed significant improvement in mood ( $p=0.019$ ), self-dissatisfaction ( $p=0.012$ ), guilt ( $p=0.003$ ), punishment ( $p=0.033$ ), body image ( $p=0.016$ ), work difficulties ( $p=0.001$ ) and fatigue ( $p<0.001$ ). (Table 1)

Participants wrote their experiences about the deep relaxation at the end of course. Students reported that they became calm and relaxed, and felt more energetic, more balanced right after the practice. There were three participants who became sleepy and languorous after the deep relaxation. Regarding the long-term effect of yoga nidra students had better night sleep, more self-confidence and more courage to do what they want to do. Several students pleased to discover that they were capable to exclude the external world and monitored their own body. Yoga nidra had impact on students' mental performance that was noticeable in more efficient learning and in concentration.

*Table 1 Wilcoxon signed rank test statistics of the 13-item Beck Depressive Inventory scores in the yoga nidra group (N=67)*

	Z	Asymptotic significance
mood	-2.352	0.019*
pessimism	-1.225	0.221
sense of failure	-0.333	0.739
self-dissatisfaction	-2.502	0.012*
guilt	-3.000	0.003**
punishment	-2.138	0.033*
suicidal ideas	0.000	1.000
social withdrawal	0.000	1.000
ability of decision	-1.460	0.144
body image	-2.405	0.016*
work difficulties	-3.400	0.001***
fatigue	-4.111	<0.000***
appetite	0.000	1.000

\*p≤0.05 \*\*p≤0.01 \*\*\*p≤0.001

## CONCLUSION

In our study we evaluated the impact of yoga nidra on the university students' wellbeing using control group that was matched in age and lifestyle. The findings of our study suggest that practising yoga nidra improves the students' general wellbeing. Kumar et al. and Jadhav et al. also found positive increase in the students' well-being that confirmed our result. [9-10]

According to the 13-item Beck Depression Scale we observed seven items in which the participants showed significant improvement after 14 weeks. The students felt less tiredness than at the beginning of the intervention, although the second survey was in December when people usually have general fatigue. The participants had fewer punishment feelings and got more pleasure from things they used to enjoy. Changes were found in mood and the body image. Students practising yoga nidra reported improvement in workload; and they did not feel guilty so much than at the beginning. These two problems seemed to be the most large-scale among the students. Yoga nidra group experienced short- and long-term effect of the positive changes of deep relaxation that encouraged them to practice this method throughout the lifetime as they enunciated in their self-report.

Yoga nidra is a simple and easy-to-practice method to improve young people's general wellbeing despite they were not familiar this relaxation method before.

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