

# YOGA AND MENTAL HEALTH: A CONCEPTUAL NOTE

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## ABSTRACT

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 fulfilment of goals and potential and a sense of connection to others.

**KEYWORDS:** Yoga, mental Health, Pranayam, Health etc.

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Yoga is one of the six orthodox systems of Indian philosophy. Because of its immense qualities, Yoga is no longer merely a philosophy; instead, it is playing the role of a torch bearer which is enlightening the masses with its spiritual and moral appeal and teaching them the way of life. In the current modern lifestyles, Yoga practitioners basically practice three out of the eight limbs of Maharishi Patanjali's Asthanga Yoga i.e., Asanas, Pranayama and Meditation. Research has proven that regular practice of Yoga helps in the development of the body, mind and spirit, leading to a healthier and more fulfilling life (Bhole, 1983; Ray and others 2001).

For many, Yoga is viewed as a physical, mental a sound body and a sound mind (Mohan, 2002). Allegedly, the practice of yoga can help a person achieve increase spiritual consciousness. A practice of yoga and benefits related to mental health and overall wellness is apparent (Schaeffer, 2002). It is very important to improve your emotional mental health by surrounding yourself with positive relationships. We as humans, feed off companionships and interaction with other people. Another way to improve your emotional mental health this participating in activities that can allow you to relax and take time for yourself

Yoga is a spiritual science for the integrated and holistic development of our physical, mental as well as moral – spiritual aspects. Yoga is based on philosophy that is practical and for our day today living. Yoga produces desirable physiological changes and has sound scientific basis. (Madan Mohan, 1983, 1992; Udupa KN & Singh RH, 1972). Yoga is the most precious gem of our cultural heritage and vedic thought. Vedic humanity as a single entity and considers the whole world as one family (Vasudaiv Kutumbakam). It is a tribute to the wisdom of yoga rishis of yore that their timeless teachings are highly relevant for the modern age when information technology is transforming the whole world into a global village.

Yoga is a way of life, an art of righteous living or an integrated system for the bonier of the body, mind and inner spirit originated, was perfected and practiced in India thousands of years ago. The references to yoga are available in Upanishads, Puranas, composed by Indian Aryan in the later Vedic and post Vedic period. The principles of yoga called Yogasutra were given by Patanjali, known as founder of yoga. These sutras are timeless and hold true even today. They help us to lead a blissful life by improving our physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing. Health is often used to refer to a state of physical, mental, social and spiritual well-being of the individual. Thus, mental health is one of the components of the broad concept of health. It is concerned with an optimum level of emotional and behavioral adjustment of the individual. It is a state of maintaining harmony or balance between the needs, desires, aspiration and attitudes of the individual with respect to the prevailing conditions in the external environment. Mental health and well-being are issues of everyday life; in families, in schools on streets and in work place. Therefore they should be of interest to every employs as well as to all sector of society. This includes sectors such as education employment, environment, housing and transport as well as health and social welfare. 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. Maintaining good mental health is crucial to living a long and healthy life. Good mental health can enhance one's life, while poor mental health can prevent someone from living an enriching life. According to Richards, Campania & Muse Burke (2010). "There is growing evidence that is showing emotional abilities are associated with prosocial behaviors such as stress management and physical health." (2010). It was also concluded in their research that people who lack emotional expression are inclined to anti-social behaviors. These behaviors are a direct reflection of their mental health.

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).

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). Gupta et al (2006) 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, Gerberg PL, Nagaraga D, Gangadhar BN, Damodaran B, et.al. 2010).

Maharshi Patanjali introduced a very fundamental and comprehensive treatise on Yoga in Sanskrit called "Yoga- Shasta" referring to a treatise or scripture on Yoga. Sage Patanjali's dissertation on Yoga is a collection of 196 sutras, which are clear, concise, accurate and unambiguous aphorisms. He defined the essence of yoga in the first sutras as "Yogah Chitta Vritti Nirodah", which means "Yoga is restraint of mental cooperation (process)". That Maharshi Patanjali has encapsulated the quintessence of Yoga in just three words reveals the depth of his experience and his ability to communicate. In this sutra chitta means mind; vritti means mental operation; nirodah means restraint. Yogashastra answers some of life's profound questions such as "who am I, why am I born, what is the purpose of life and existence, where am I going, how do I deal with my mind, and how can I be happy and peaceful. Yoga provides answers for these questions and more.

Mental health can be seen as on unstable continuum, where an individual's mental health may have many different possible values. (Keyes, Corey, 2002). Mental wellness is generally viewed as a positive attribute, such that a person can reach enhanced levels of mental health, even if the person does not have any diagnosed mental health condition. This definition of mental health highlights emotional well – being, the capacity to live a full and creative life, and the flexibility to deal with life's inequitable changes. Mental health conditions which include behavioral and mental health problems (e.g. depression, anxiety, substance abuse, aggressive disruptive behavior, attention – deficit and hyperactivity problems and post-traumatic stress disorder) are the leading causes of adjustment problems in adolescents and young people. They contribute heavily to disability and lost productivity across the life course (Gore and others, 2011) on a global level, it is estimated that approximately 20 percent of youth experience a mental health condition each year (Patel, Flisher, Hetrick and McGorry, 2007, UNICEF, 2012). There is a higher prevalence of certain mental disorders among specific groups. For example, depression is more common in women and all mental disorders show higher prevalence rates among people living in poverty, (Harris, 2001; WHO, 2001; WHO, 2004b). 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 (Berry, 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.

## CONCLUSION

Life is a continuous process of overcoming difficulties or of making adjustments. Adjustment is the behavioral process by which humans and other animals maintain equilibrium among their various needs or between their needs and the obstacles of their environments. A sequence of adjustments begins when a need is felt and ends when it is satisfied. Hungry people for example are stimulated by their physiological state to seek food. When they eat, they reduce the stimulating condition that impelled them to activity and they are there by adjusted to this particular need. In general the adjustment process involves four parts: a need or motive in the form of a strong persistent stimulus, the thwarting or non-fulfilment of this need, varied activity or exploratory behavior accompanied by problem solving and some response that removes or at least reduces the initiating stimulus and completes the adjustment. Social and cultural adjustments are similar to physiological adjustments. People strive to be comfortable in their surroundings and to have their psychological needs (such as love or affirmation) met through the social networks they inhabit. When needs arise, especially in new or changed surroundings, they impel interpersonal activity meant to satisfy those needs. In this way, people increase their familiarity and they come to expect that their needs will be met in the future through their social networks. Ongoing difficulties in social and cultural adjustment may be accompanied by anxiety or depression (Britannica, 2013). Mental health is an indivisible part of general health and wellbeing. Mental health refers to the characteristics of individuals, but we can also speak about the mental health of families, groups, communities and each society.

When you lift weights, your muscles get stronger and bigger. 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.

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.

Khalsa stated that a majority of the research on yoga as a therapeutic intervention was conducted in India and a significant fraction of these were published in Indian journals, some of which are difficult to acquire for Western clinicians and researchers. In their bibliometric analysis from 2004, they found that 48% of the enrolled studies were uncontrolled, while 40% were randomized clinical trials (RCT), and 12% non-RCT (N-RCT). Main categories which were addressed were psychiatric, cardiovascular, and respiratory disorders.

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