

A Study on the Emotional State of Yoga Practitioners

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ABSTRACT

Background: Emotional state indicates the state of a person's emotions, especially with regard to pleasure or dejection. Emotional states indirectly affect behaviour. Adolescents practicing yoga have been reported to significantly differ from the non-yoga group on emotional regulation.

Method: The study was carried out among 100 yoga practitioners by Patanjali Yoga Research Centre, Kozhikode, Kerala, India using a questionnaire containing the measure of emotional state and the characteristics of the respondents such as sex, age, marital status, period of yoga practice (months), and the level of psychological problems, if any, experienced during the previous two months. Emotional state of the yoga practitioners was quantified as the experience of positive and negative emotional state items, with five-point responses ranging from "felt very often" to "felt very rarely" scored from 5 to 1 (reverse scored for negative items) as suggested by Yaden & Haybron (2022). The results were analysed as proportion, scores and through ANOVA.

Results: The results have shown that yoga practice has helped the respondents to improve their positive emotions and reduce the experience of negative emotions, helping them to achieve a better emotional state. Respondents who had less of psychological problems during the past two months and with higher period of yoga practice achieved better positive and negative emotional state. In addition to more psychological problems faced, lesser period of yoga practice by those reporting more psychological problems could have also contributed to comparatively low emotional state scores for respondents who had more psychological problems, as observed under the study.

Conclusion: Yoga has helped in improving positive emotions and reducing negative emotions for the practitioners, which would contribute to better mental health. It will be useful if, in addition to the academic/research institutions, yoga centres in India also undertake studies on the effects of yoga using the expertise of competent researchers, and transfer the results to people so that they may feel more motivated to start practicing yoga for achieving better wellbeing in their lives. This is especially important in a country like India, where the level of adoption of yoga is not much.

Keywords: Yoga Practice, Positive Emotions, Negative Emotions, Emotional State

Introduction

Emotional state indicates the state of a person's emotions, especially with regard to pleasure or dejection. Emotional states indirectly affect behaviour. They do not cause it. When we are feeling angry, we are more likely to act aggressively. When we are relaxed, we will more likely take time to make decisions. Yoga practice contributes to mental health improvement. Adolescents practicing yoga have been reported to significantly differ from the non-yoga group on emotional regulation [1]. Findings from a survey found that 67% of people feel emotionally better due to their yoga practice.

Methodology

The study was carried out among 100 yoga practitioners by Patanjali Yoga Research Centre, Kozhikode, Kerala, India using a questionnaire containing the measure of emotional state and the characteristics of the respondents such as sex, age, marital status, period of yoga practice (months), and the level of psychological problems, if any, experienced during the previous two months. Emotional state of the yoga practitioners was quantified as the experience of positive and negative emotional state items, with five-point responses ranging from "felt very often" to "felt very rarely" scored from 5 to 1 (reverse scored for negative items) as suggested by [2]. The results were analysed as proportion, scores and through the statistical test of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA).

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Results

Table 1 gives shows data on the experience of seven positive emotional state parameters after starting yoga practice.

Table 1: Experience of positive emotional state parameters after starting yoga practice

Positive emotional state parameter and its frequency of experience	Respondents (%)
Felt fully energetic	
Very often	65
Often	10
Sometimes	10
Rarely	10
Very rarely	05
Total	100
Felt active in life	
Very often	60
Often	05
Sometimes	15
Rarely	10
Very rarely	10
Total	100
Felt happy	
Very often	60
Often	10
Sometimes	15
Rarely	15
Total	100
Felt cheerful	
Very often	75
Often	05
Sometimes	05
Rarely	15
Total	100
Was able to laugh thinking about a lot of things	
Very often	45
Often	20
Sometimes	20
Rarely	15
Total	100
Felt relaxed	
Very often	45
Often	15
Sometimes	10
Rarely	10
Very rarely	20
Total	100
Felt calm	
Very often	60

Often	10
Sometimes	10
Rarely	15
Very rarely	05
Total	100

Table 2 shows data on the experience of eight negative emotional state parameters after starting yoga practice.

Table 2: Experience of negative emotional state parameters after starting yoga practice

Negative emotional state parameter and its frequency of experience	Respondents (%)
Felt nervous	
Sometimes	25
Very rarely	75
Total	100
Felt anxious	
Very often	05
Sometimes	15
Rarely	25
Very rarely	55
Total	100
Felt tense	
Very often	05
Sometimes	10
Rarely	85
Total	100
Felt too tired to do very much of things	
Sometimes	40
Rarely	30
Very rarely	30
Total	100
Felt low in energy	
Often	10
Sometimes	40
Rarely	20
Very rarely	30
Total	100
Felt sluggish	
Sometimes	25
Rarely	20
Very rarely	55
Total	100
Felt sad	
Often	10
Sometimes	20
Rarely	15
Very rarely	55

Total	100
Felt depressed	
Sometimes	20
Rarely	25
Very rarely	55
Total	100

Table 3 shows the data on the statistical test of ANOVA of the influence of psychological problems on total emotional state score after starting yoga practice.

Table 3: ANOVA of the influence of psychological problems on total emotional state score after starting yoga practice

Level of psychological problems experienced in the past two months	Mean total emotional state score	F	p level
Very much	36.0	19.0	0.001
Much	38.0		
Slight	68.2		
Nil	65.3		

Table 4 gives details of ANOVA of the influence of period of yoga practice on total emotional state score after starting yoga practice.

Table 4: ANOVA of the influence of period of yoga practice on total emotional state score after starting yoga practice

Period of yoga practice (Months)	Mean total emotional state score	F	p level
up to 6	57.0	2.62	0.10
12 to 16	67.3		
20 to 36	69.5		

Table 5 gives the results of ANOVA of the influence of psychological problems on positive and negative emotional state scores after starting yoga practice.

Table 5: ANOVA of the influence of psychological problems on positive and negative emotional state scores after starting yoga practice

Level of psychological problems experienced in the past two months	Mean total positive emotional state score	F	p level
Very much	14.0	15.7	0.001
Much	14.0		
Slight	31.4		
Nil	30.3		
Level of psychological problems experienced in the past two months	Mean total negative emotional state score	F	p level
Very much	22.0	9.9	0.001
Much	24.0		
Slight	36.8		
Nil	35.1		

Table 6 shows the results of ANOVA of the influence of period of yoga practice on positive and negative emotional state scores after starting yoga practice.

Table 6. ANOVA of the influence of period of yoga practice on positive and negative emotional state scores after starting yoga practice

Period of yoga practice (Months)	Mean total positive emotional state score	F	p level
up to 6	25.3	2.9	0.10
12 to 16	32.7		
20 to 36	32.2		
Period of yoga practice (Months)	Mean total negative emotional state score	F	p level
up to 6	31.7	2.6	0.10
12 to 16	34.7		
20 to 36	38.0		

Table 7 gives details of the period of yoga practice of respondents reporting different levels of psychological problems experienced during the previous two months.

Table 7: Period of yoga practice of respondents reporting different levels of psychological problems

Period of yoga practice (Months)	Respondents (%)			
	Level of psychological problems experienced during the previous two months			
	Slight	Much	Very much	Nil
Up to 1	20.0	-	100	25.0
3 to 6	-	100	-	50.0
12 to 20	40.0	-	-	-
16 to 32	-	-	-	25.0
36	40.0	-	-	-
Total	100	100	100	100

Discussion

Positive Emotions

It can be made out from Table 1 that with respect to the seven positive emotional states, namely, feeling fully energetic, active, happy, cheerful, Able to laugh thinking about lot of things, feeling relaxed, and calm, 60 % and more of yoga practitioners have experienced these positive emotions much and very much when considered together. The practice of yoga would help in maintaining better mental health through the development of positive feelings, which would contribute to overcoming psychosomatic diseases/problems in the life of the practitioners [3].

Negative Emotions

It can be made out from Table 2 that with respect to the negative emotions, namely, feeling nervous, anxious, tense, tired to do very much of things, sluggish, sad, and depressed, 60 % and more of yoga practitioners have reported experiencing them rarely and very rarely when considered together or rarely / very rarely only. Only with respect to the negative emotion, namely, feeling low in energy have 50 % of yoga practitioners reported experiencing it rarely and very rarely when considered together.

The influence of yoga on both cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression items related to emotion regulation has been reported [4]. A study has found the effect of yoga in maintaining good mental state among the practitioners [5]. Improvement in 34 positive and negative mood parameters after yoga practice, with statistical influence of the period of yoga practice on mood improvement was observed [6]. Yoga is explicitly aimed at increasing mindful awareness, self-compassion and body awareness, and it is possible that these factors may serve as mediators for emotional wellbeing [7,8]. In a study on the emotional stability of meditation, which is a yogic practice, it was observed that it helped the practitioners to experience more positive emotions and reduce the experience of negative emotions [9].

Emotional State Score

Those who report experiencing very much as well as much psychological problems during the past two months have low total emotional state scores, when compared to those who report slight problems and no psychological problems. The lowest score of 36 is for the respondents reporting very much psychological problems. The statistical difference in total emotional state scores is also evident (Table 3).

Data presented in Table 4 shows the statistical significance of the difference in mean total emotional state scores based on the period of yoga practice, with respondents having up to 6 months of practice getting the lowest score (57), followed by those having 12 to 16 months of practice (67.3) and then, by yoga practitioners who have done yoga for 20 to 36 months (69.5).

The results of ANOVA presented in Table 5 indicates that, as observed with respect to the total emotional state scores, statistically significant difference exists between the mean positive emotional state scores as well as negative emotional state scores of yoga practitioners reporting different levels of psychological problems experienced during the past two months. Respondents reporting the experience of very much of psychological problems have a low score of 14 only, when compared to the higher scores of people reporting slight and no psychological problems.

Similar to the total scores, respondents having up to 6 months of practice get the lowest positive as well as negative emotional state scores, when compared to those having 12 to 16 months and 20 to 36 months of yoga practice with statistically significant difference in positive as well as negative emotional state scores between these categories (Table 6).

It can be made out from Table 7 that all the respondents reporting very much of psychological problems during the past two months have practiced yoga for one month only. Similarly, all the respondents reporting much psychological problems have done yoga for 3 to 6 months only. However, 40 % of respondents reporting only slight psychological problems have practiced yoga for 12 to 20 months, while another 40 % in this group have done yoga for a period of 36 months. With regard to those who did not have any psychological problems during the past two months, only 50 % have done yoga for 3 to 6 months, while 25 % have done it for 16 to 32 months. Hence, in addition to more

psychological problems faced, lesser period of yoga practice by those reporting more psychological problems might have also contributed to comparatively low emotional state scores for respondents who had more psychological problems, as observed in the study.

Conclusion

The finding of the study indicate that yoga practice has helped the respondents to improve their positive emotions and reduce the experience of negative emotions, helping them to achieve a better emotional state, which will contribute to their mental health. Respondents who had less of psychological problems during the past two months and with higher period of yoga practice achieved better positive and negative emotional state. Further, in addition to more psychological problems faced, lesser period of yoga practice by those reporting more psychological problems could have also contributed to comparatively low emotional state scores for respondents who had more psychological problems in the study.

It will be worthwhile if, in addition to the academic/research institutions, yoga centres in India also undertake studies on the effects of yoga using the expertise of competent researchers, and transfer the results through seminars etc. to people so that they may feel more motivated to start practicing yoga for achieving better wellbeing in their lives. This is especially important in a country like India, where the level of adoption of yoga is not much.

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