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Yoga and its role in improving interpersonal relationships among individuals

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Abstract

Yoga is one of the most valuable contributions of ancient Indian philosophy. It is a complete science of life, the oldest system of personal growth. It is an important medium of maintaining and improving health and well-being. The benefits of yoga on body and mind are threefold. It maintains health, it speeds up the process of recovery, and improves the immunity and prevents the development of diseases. In the last few decades considerable research has been carried out throughout the world to assess the benefits of different types of yoga practices on the preventive and curatives aspects of diseases. However, some research on the possible psychological benefits of yoga is relatively lesser and remains an important area of investigation. Therefore, the present study is undertaken to how the practice of yoga influences psychological constructs of an individual. Based on existing literature, psychological construct namely interpersonal relationships is selected for the study. The objective of the study is to assess the interpersonal relationships of the individuals. Initially it was noticed that the people are having disturbed interpersonal relationships. After giving yoga practices and especially pranayama, it was noticed that there was an improvement in interpersonal relationships among people. Therefore, it can be concluded that by practicing yoga, interpersonal relationships among the individuals can be improved and it can also improve the overall health of an individual along with the psychological aspects.

Keywords: interpersonal relationship, psychology, yoga, health

Introduction

The present modern world is full of competition, and one must work hard to survive. Thus, while a certain section of population has become richer in the materialistic sense, it has not essentially ensured a healthy state of mind and body. While most urban youth engage in strenuous mental activities at workplace, their physical movement is greatly restricted. Even in children the scope of physical activities or exercise has decreased going to academic pressures and introduction to digital gadgets. This has resulted in chronic conditions such as obesity diabetes hypertension and posture related issue such as cervical pain arthritis etc. In this fast modern life yoga is a medium through which the mental and physical health of the individual can be improved. Yogic practices make the practitioner aware of his inner capacities and potentials and therefore pave away to establish a balance from the nature and lead a peaceful life ahead. Yoga is a scientific process through which an individual can develop all aspects of his physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing and tackle the disturbances generated by the modern-day lifestyle. All relationships develop in stages where it starts from meeting and making an acquaintance to the termination of the relationship. In interpersonal relationship formation, the first stage is the acquaintance stage. In this stage, the first impressions of the interacting individuals are developed. The first impression plays an important role in determining the path of the relationship. A good first impression is a key in forming a long-lasting meaningful relationship. The next stage is the stage of trust building and compatibility checking. If the other person is trustworthy and compatible the relationship moves to the next stage called the continuation stage. In this stage, individuals establish a sense of mutual commitment. Interpersonal relationship and social support are negatively associated with loneliness (Kong & You, 2013) [16]. Lack of social support increases the feelings of loneliness (Hudson, Elek & Campbell-Grossman, 2000) [11]. There is also an association between quality of interpersonal relationships and loneliness. Loneliness predicts poor social interactions

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(Hawkley, Burleson, Berntson & Cacioppo, 2003) [8], and negative interpersonal relationships result in greater loneliness (Vanhalst, Luyckx & Goossens, 2014) [23].

Research Methodology

Number of reviews considered - 26

Tools and Techniques: Systematic Literature Review

Research Design: Conceptual Research Design.



Literature Review

An individual’s social environment such as school, college, neighbourhood, and work provide opportunities to interact with others and form relationships. The basis of interpersonal relationships is socialization in real life. These meetings and developing relationships lead to the development of social support, community support, especially during situations of crisis and finally, establishing overall wellbeing. For instance, positive relationships among family members, sibling relationships, parent-child relationships are crucial in maintaining the wellbeing of children while negative relationships lead to a decline in their wellbeing (Goswami, 2012) [7]. Children with better interpersonal relationships have lower levels of emotional distress (Kenny, Dooley & Fitzgerald, 2012) [14]. Interpersonal relationship also significantly improves performance and achievement (Aspelin, 2012) [1]. It plays an important role in child development and ensuring wellbeing. Even in adolescents, interpersonal relationships offer benefits that enhance their development and wellbeing. Positive relationship between teacher and student encourages the development of social and behavioral competencies and improves their performance in academics as well (Pianta, 1999) [23]. The role of peer relationships during adolescence is significant as it contributes to intimacy and emotional support (Crease & Ladd, 2005; Mortimer & Call, 2001; Way & Greene, 2006) [5, 21].

Barnes *et al.* (2007) [2] conducted a longitudinal study to assess the role of the mindfulness on relationship stress and relationship satisfaction among college going dating scholars. The researchers found that higher the trait mindfulness, lower the relationship stress and greater relationship satisfaction. Furthermore, the study showed that trait mindfulness is predictor of lower stress and positive perception of the relationship, whereas state mindfulness was related to quality of communication. Brunell *et al.* (2010) [3] investigated the degree to which the authenticity in relationship is connected to relational outcomes, relational behaviour, and personal wellbeing of the dating couples. 62 heterosexual couples were assessed using measures of dispositional authenticity and relational behaviours (including accommodation, self-disclosure, and trust), relationship outcomes, and well-being. The findings of the research showed that authenticity was positively related to demonstrating healthy relationship behaviours, which in turn promotes positive relationship outcomes and higher personal well-being. Charbonneau (2011) [4] conducted a study to see the effect of the practice of Kundalini yoga and the development of interpersonal and intrapersonal awareness in adolescents. For the purpose of the study, middle year students were selected. The study found that practice of Kundalini Yoga led to development of better interpersonal and intrapersonal skills of the students.

Dush & Amato (2005) [6] found that individuals who are in committed relationship reported having higher subjective wellbeing compared to the individuals in casual relationship and alike, participants in happy relationship reported higher subjective wellbeing compared to individuals in an unhappy relationship. Head & Hammer (2013) [9] studied the harm that is caused by self-objectification specifically among women and proposed a model to alleviate the negative outcomes by Relational-cultural theory (RCT; that assumes that through the relationships, one can learn to reconnect with his/her authentic self and with others) and the physical and mental practice of yoga. The authors argued that a method to reduce self-objectification should include a humane approach to reconnect with one’s internal self-talk as well as possibilities to develop genuine, trustworthy, and reliable social relations. Thus, integrating the physical practice of yoga with RCT can provide an opportunity to the counsellor to develop an interdependent relationship that can facilitate a healthy mode of viewing self and a mechanism to develop authentic relationship among their clients.

According to Millers (1986) RCT is consist of five good components *viz*; Zest (vitality or energy), the ability to take action (empowerment), an awareness of self and others (clarity), increased self-worth, and a desire to connect with more people because of the current relationship. RCT and yoga are complementary to each other and facilitate a mind-body approach to fight the self-objectification and its negative consequences. The basic tenants of both yoga and RCT are to connect the individual to his/her authentic self. Yoga boosts five good components of the RCT. In turn it promotes the authentic relationships with oneself and others. With acceptance of oneself, the individual feels more empowered and elevated desire to connect with others

Holt-Lundstad *et al.* (2010) [10] in their Meta analytic review that was aimed at determining the extent to which social relationships reduce the risk for mortality and which dimension of social relationship are predictive of high mortality and what aspect of social relationship can moderate the risk of mortality. From the review of 148 studies (308,849 participants), the authors found that probability of survival of



the participants having strong social relationships increases by 50% regardless of age, gender, initial health condition, cause of death, and follow-up period. The researchers further found that the close relationship not only make patients healthier but happier as well. The social integration predicted the mortality strongly, whereas residential status (living alone versus with others) was the least predicting factor.

Kishida *et al.* (2017) ^[15] conducted a survey among the yoga practitioners using content analysis. On the basis of the responses obtained to their open-ended questions the researchers identified four major themes, viz; generation of calm state through yoga practice, mindfulness, self-compassion and sense of connectedness. The researchers advocated that the practice of yoga enhances the mindfulness and that in turn leads to the cultivation of the self-compassion, which in turn is the precursor of the development of the self-kindness. Furthermore, the researchers found that there was a sense of feeling and connectedness among the participants who practiced yoga in their community yoga groups.

Monk-Turner and Turner (2010) ^[19] conducted a study to assess the differences between students who practiced yoga and college students who didn't practice yoga on their mind, body and spiritual dimensions. Mind, body and spirit survey instruments were administered to the participants from both experimental and control groups. The findings were assessed on five indicators to assess mental health differences between yoga practitioners and college students. The results indicated few interesting findings. It was found that college students reported better mental health than those who practiced yoga regularly. It was the inverse of the relationship which was expected. College students also reported greater life stability as well as more satisfying interpersonal relationship in comparison to the yoga practitioners. Further, the tolerance of college students was also higher than yoga practitioners. It was found that college students were more tolerant of others irrespective of whether others approved or disapproved their beliefs and actions. On the domains of morals and health values, yoga practitioners had better scores than college students. It was found that yoga practitioners had stronger morals and health values. In addition, they were more able to express their feelings in a healthy manner and understand the feelings of others. In terms of spirit, there were significant differences in the yoga practitioners and college students on five out of nine spirit dimensions. Yoga practitioners were more able to express their spirituality in an appropriate and healthy manner in comparison to the college students. They also recognized the positive contribution of faith on the quality of life. The yoga practitioners group also reported that undertaking new experiences routinely enhanced their spiritual health and provided a positive outlook on life. Their happiness levels were also reported from coming from within. The study found significant and somewhat unexpected results and differences between yoga practitioners and college students on domains of mind, body and spirit.

Ross *et al.* (2013) conducted a study among the practitioners of Iyengar yoga at the University Of Maryland School Of Nursing, the authors found that 67% practitioners reported and strongly affirmed that yoga has helped them to improve their interpersonal relationships and this result was independent of the race, gender, or education of the participants. Furthermore, individuals who were suffering from chronic health issues were firmer in claiming that their relationships improved due to practice of yoga

Ross *et al.* (2014) ^[20] conducted a large-cross sectional research to assess the effectiveness of the yoga in improving

one's interpersonal relationships. Content analysis method was used to qualitatively analyse written comments from 1067 yoga practitioners regarding the role of yoga in improving interpersonal relationships. Four themes emerged from the content analysis: 1) yoga practice results in personal transformation, 2) enhances social interaction, 3) renders coping strategies to manage relationship difficulties and losses and 4) facilitates spiritual transcendence Interpersonal relationship plays a vital role in psychological wellbeing of the individual. It promotes the self-esteem, self-confidence and gives a sense of security to the individuals who have healthy and positive interpersonal relationships. Baldwin & Hoffman (2002) showed that as the family cohesiveness increased the self-esteem of the adolescents also increased over the time. In the study the family cohesiveness was measured as the duration family members spent together, the quality of their communication and the participation of the adolescents in decision making. Huntsinger & Luecken (2004) ^[12] examined the relationship of attachment styles with promotion of health behavior among young adults and how this relationship is mediated by the self-esteem of the individual. University students were assessed for their attachment style, self-esteem, and health behaviour. The results obtained indicated that individuals having secure attachment style manifested healthier preventive health behaviour and had higher self-esteem compared to participants having insecure attachment styles. Mahon, Yarcheski and Yarcheski (2004) ^[18] analysed the association between social support and positive health practices in early adolescents and also assessed the mediating role of loneliness and hopefulness in this relationship. A total of 134 adolescents aged 12 – 14 years of age were assessed on the measures of social support, loneliness, hopefulness, and positive health practices. The results showed that social support was positively correlated with positive health practices and the regression analysis showed that the loneliness and hopefulness were not so strong mediators of the relationship between social support and positive health practices". Kafetsios and Sideridis (2006) ^[13] analysed the association between attachment, social support and well-being of early and late adults. The results obtained showed that the anxious attachment style was negatively correlated with wellbeing and this association was stronger in early adults compared to late adults. Similarly, there was negative association between avoidant attachment style and perceived social support among late adults only, whereas this association was not significant in early adults. Furthermore, perceived social support mediated the effects of avoidant attachment on mental health and loneliness in the late adults.

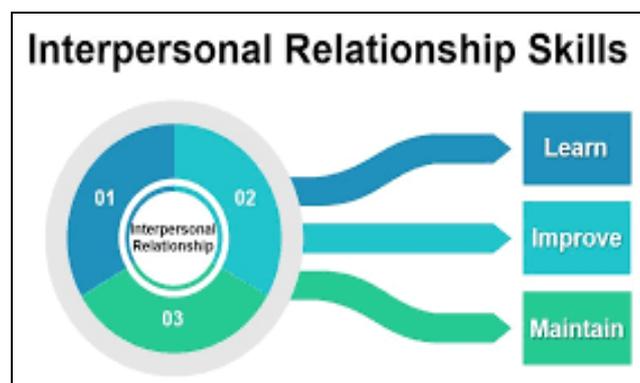


Table 1: Synthesis of literature

S No.	Author name	Year	Summarized Review
1.	a. Goswami b. Brunell <i>et al.</i> c. Head& Hammer	2012 2010 2013	IR* leads to the development of social & community support and also established an overall wellbeing.
2	a. Holt-Lundstad <i>et al.</i> b. Millers	2010 1986	The close IR* not only make people healthier but happier as well. The individual feels more empowered and elevated desire to connect with others
3	a. Kishida <i>et al.</i> b. Mahon, Yarcheski and Yarcheski	2017 2004	The practice of yoga enhances the mindfulness and that in turn leads to the cultivation of the self-compassion
4.	a. Charbonneau b. Monk-Turner and Turner	2011 2010	Kundalini Yoga led to development of better interpersonal and intrapersonal skills of the students. Yoga practice enhanced the spiritual health and provided a positive outlook on life.

IR*- Interpersonal Relationship

Conclusions

Therefore, the fulfilment of interpersonal needs establishes a sense of belonging, being valued and a sense of being empowered. Being part of a group provides a sense of security and mutual understanding that is important in determining the personality of the individual.

Interaction with social groups and networks since childhood shaped the personality of the individual. The need of inclusion in social networks is a significant developmental milestone of the person. The adequate development of interpersonal skills during childhood and adolescence shapes adult behaviour. The development of social and interpersonal skills is important in maintaining friendships and romantic relationships which is important for young adults (La Greca & Harrison, 2005) ^[17]. If these relationships are not adequately fulfilling, they lead to poor mental health. On the other hand, healthy interpersonal relationships lead to healthy psychosocial development and wellbeing (Nangle *et al.*, 2003). Healthy interpersonal relationships provide happiness, support and security, a lack of understanding or mutual benefit may also deteriorate the relationship. Dissatisfaction, lack of communication, boredom, resentment, betrayal, loss of faith, and emotional hurt may lead to the termination of the relationship. Yoga is one of the biggest contributions of ancient Indian philosophy. Literally, Yoga stands for union, or the integration of one's body with soul and all dimensions of one's existence. The practice of Yoga increases one's concentration, attention, patience, dedication and determination- all factors which are crucial to succeed in life. The beneficial effects of Yoga can be felt on physical, psychological, social and spiritual health of an individual. Through Yoga and a Yoga-based lifestyle, one can merge with the divine force and awaken the unconscious. Therefore, through the practice of Yoga, one can feel the rise of spiritual power which ultimately gives rise to good health.

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