



A Study of the Impact of Yoga Based Practices on Positive Psychological Outcomes in Young Healthy Population

Dr Sushama Suresh Kale*

¹PhD Yogashastra and Positive Psychology (Mumbai University) MA Yogashastra Founder Principal – Yogaarathi School of Indic Studies (Affiliated to KKSU Nagpur)

***Correspondence:** <drsushama.kale@yogaarathi.org>

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ABSTRACT

This research focuses on the relationship between Yoga and Positive Psychological outcome in undergraduates pursuing professional graduation programs. The study was conducted in two parts. The first part was a cross-sectional survey study where the author analyzed the Flourishing of 179 undergraduates pursuing professional graduation programs and related their level of Flourishing to Emotional Awareness and Self-Regulation. The author explored the role of mediators in this relationship, namely, Emotional Awareness and Self-Regulation. The second part of the research was an experimental study. A group of 70 undergraduates pursuing professional graduation programs was randomly divided into two equal subgroups of 35 each. One group was provided YBP during a course on Certificate Course in Yoga Application while the other group acted as control. Pre and Post course assessments revealed a significant increase in the Positive Psychological Outcome (Flourishing) scores of the experimental group over the control group, thus reiterating the relationship between YBP and Flourishing. The results indicate that Yoga Based Practices (YBP) positively impact the level of Flourishing, both directly and through the mediators.

Keywords: relationship; Psychological; professional; Self Regulation

INTRODUCTION

India is the country with the maximum young adult population in today's world. Recent research shows that young adults are extremely under stress. They are facing social and personal challenges in the form of academic stress, financial pressure, emotionally taxing situations, natural disasters, terrorism, recession, failure, extreme competition, and relationship issues. They are more stressed than any other current living generation. If stress is unaddressed consistently, it is common knowledge that stress can have serious health consequences. A high-stress level may result in chronic conditions like anxiety, joint pain, muscle pain, high blood sugar, high blood pressure, and a weakened immune system which may end to the development of major illnesses such as depression, diabetes, heart disease, and obesity or exacerbate existing health issues (Hagen and Nayar, 2014). In face of such adversities and negativities, is there anything that helps in the

enhancement of happiness? To live a happier, healthier life, it is important to learn how to be positive.

Yoga, originating from India, is an ancient contemplative practice dating back over 3,500 years, aiming both – to lessen suffering and promote optimal physical and mental health. The extant literature suggests that Yoga is not meant for treatment purposes but for the prevention of physical and mental illness, but rather for the promotion of physical and mental thriving. (Cope, 1999; Feuerstein, 2011).

Hence traditional psychologists have always focused on the study of undesirable behaviours or disorders rather than on the positive aspects of human behaviour. As a reaction to this, Positive psychology focuses on virtues, character strengths, and happiness, leading to achieving a meaningful and enriching life. Positive psychology is the science of positive subjective experience and positive individual traits like

wisdom, creativity, future-mindedness, courage, spirituality, responsibility, and promises to improve the quality of life and prevent pathologies (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2014, pp. 279). Positive Psychology is a newly emerging branch of Psychology. 'Positive psychology is the scientific study of what makes life worth living' - 'Peterson, 2008'. It is a scientific approach to studying human thoughts, feelings, and behaviour. It focuses on building on personal strengths and all the positive qualities and experiences in life. Martin Seligman officially introduced Positive Psychology as a subfield when he chose it as a theme of the American Psychological Association Conference in 1998. So this branch of psychology gives importance to studying things like joy, courage, and happiness rather than stress, anxiety, illness, disorders, conflicts, frustrations, etc. Seligman (2011) identifies five commonly recognized factors that are characteristic of human flourishing or well-being:

(1) positive emotion (2) relationships (3) engagement (4) meaning and (5) achievement

In spite of the significant commonality in the objectives, promises, and potential of Yoga and Positive Psychology, the theoretical linkages, and empirical inquiry are scant in the literature (with the notable exception of Butzer, 2016). Rao and Paranjpe (2016) call for conceptually and empirically examining these plausible convergences. Aiming to address this need, the author wishes to study the association of Yoga Based Practices (YBP) on emotional awareness and self-regulation which show the positive impact on other widely recognized variables of positive psychology like Flourishing (PERMA). Thus, the project is aimed at contributing to Yoga psychology and positive psychology literature. The empirical study was carried out in two phases. First, the author conducted a survey to examine the theoretically derived model of the association between emotional awareness and Flourishing (PERMA) and self-regulation and Flourishing (PERMA). Next, in the second phase, using an experimental design, followed by the examination of the central argument of the study that Yoga Based Practices (YBP) enhance Flourishing (PERMA) mediated by emotional awareness and self-regulation.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this section, the author explicates the theoretical concepts of Yoga and Positive Psychology (Flourishing). Then the author presents arguments for explaining how YBP can enhance Positive Psychological Outcomes (Flourishing).

Positive Psychology

Positive Psychology is the scientific study of human flourishing and optimal functioning. Sheldon and King (2001)

define Positive Psychology as “nothing more than the scientific study of ordinary human strengths and virtues”, seeking to find out what works, what is right, and what is improving in our daily lives .” Gable and Haidt(2005, p 104) suggest that Positive psychology is “ the study of the conditions and processes that contribute to the flourishing or optimal functioning of people, groups, and institutions. ” Positive Psychology is a Psychology of positive mortal functions which helps to make thriving individualities and communities. It's hoped that Positive Psychology would seek to find and nurture genius and creativity and make normal life more fulfilling. Positive psychologists aim beyond managing internal illness and strive to see their guests not only survive but also thrive. They declare that” The avoidance of psychopathology, negative behavioural issues, or illness is no guarantee that one will also flourish and be well in multiple realms of life”(Ryff & Burton, 2003). Positive Psychology is intended to round and not replace traditional psychology. It doesn't seek to deny the significance of studying how effects go wrong. Still, it does assert that strength is as important as weakness and that it's just as essential to erecting the stylish effects in life as to repairing the worst positive psychology is concerned with adding well-being. Well- being isn't the same thing as happiness. Well-being as being made up of five pillars. Positive Psychology focuses on Positive Emotions, Positive Engagement, Positive Relationships, Positive Meaning, and Positive Accomplishment.

Flourishing

A growing number of individuals, organizations and policymakers worldwide are focusing on well-being, and with good reason. Evidence indicates that subjective well-being, life satisfaction, optimism, happiness, and other positive constructs are associated with numerous desirable outcomes, including lower rates of divorce, greater educational and occupational success, stronger friendships, and better physical health (e.g., Diener & Chan, 2011; Huppert, 2009; Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005). Well-being can be defined and measured objectively (e.g., sufficient resources to meet basic needs, opportunities for education, lack of environmental pollutants) or subjectively. In the literature, terms such as “happiness”, “subjective well-being”, “thriving”, and “flourishing” are often used interchangeably. Ryff and Keyes (1995) define psychological well-being across six domains (self-acceptance, positive relationships with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth). Keyes (2002) suggests flourishing requires “symptoms” of high emotional, psychological, and social well-being. Seligman's (2011) PERMA model advocates that flourishing arises from five well-being pillars (positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and

accomplishment). Huppert and So (2013) define 10 components of flourishing that are the opposite of the main symptoms of depression and anxiety (competence, emotional stability, engagement, meaning, optimism, positive emotion, positive relationships, resilience, self-esteem, and vitality). The author defines “flourishing” as a dynamic optimal state of psychosocial functioning that arises from functioning well across multiple psychosocial domains. Specifically, the author focuses here on the five domains defined by Seligman’s (2011) PERMA theory: positive emotion (P), engagement (E), relationships (R), meaning (M), and accomplishment (A).

Conceptions of flourishing articulate the nature of human strengths and well-being and thereby offer enriched formulations of what it means to thrive under challenge. The presence of mental health is described as flourishing, and the absence of mental health is characterized as languishing in life. To flourish means to live within an optimal range of human functioning, one that connotes goodness, generativity, growth, and resilience. Flourishing contrasts not just with pathology but also with languishing: a disorder intermediate along the mental health continuum experienced by people who describe their lives as “hollow” or “empty.”

Yoga

Yoga offers a holistic model using an entirely different concept of understanding human personality and existence; it also offers self-corrective techniques to restore normalcy. Ancient texts dating back to about 5000 years (Rig Veda, Patanjali Yoga Sutra, and Ayurveda) provide a highly evolved conceptual basis for the understanding of Human Personality and Positive Health. WHO defines “Health” positively as “a state of complete physical, mental, social and spiritual well-being and not merely an absence of disease”. In the same context, “Mental Health may be defined as the ability to face and solve problems and choose the correct alternative, which results in feelings of contentment and happiness. The definition also serves three aspects of human personality i.e., the conative, the affective, and the cognitive. Conative – an ability, the willpower for action. Affective – the emotional aspect, the feeling of contentment and happiness. Cognitive – the rational, the ability to think and choose the rational course of action resulting in success and satisfaction. We come across the reference to the “happy state of senses(body), the mind and the psyche or the soul in ancient Indian literature “Prasanna Atmendriya Manah”, mentioned in Ayurvedic text. The Indian term for ‘Health’ is “Swasthya”, which is comprised of two terms, “Swa” and “Astha”, meaning established in own Self”, PYS says “Tada Drashtu Swarupe Avasthanam”. A yogi is established in his own Self (Purush) and hence only a yogi can be considered to be healthy. Yoga considers man in a totality – body, mind, intellect, and spirit.

Awareness is the key of Yoga and increasing awareness definitely leads to better health.

Yoga is a means to achieve Positive Psychology which answers the questions about how to lead a life, and find happiness and satisfaction. The Holistic approach of yoga offers a comprehensive means to enhance the psychology of well-being by achieving mastery at all the levels of human personality. Yoga is not a treatment for a disease; rather, it is a way to promote both mental and physical health. According to Becker (2000), “the practice of postures, breathing exercises, and concentrative meditation induces a sense of well-being that may support conventional psychiatric treatment” (p. 132).

HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Emotional awareness is the ability to understand, use, and manage your own emotions in positive ways to relieve stress, communicate effectively, empathize with others, overcome challenges and defuse conflict.

It's similar to self-regulation which refers to one's ability to regulate and channelize their energy and emotions, especially emotions that are negative, depressing, or overwhelming. Instead of letting your emotions dictate your way of life, you should be able to modulate and take charge of them and use them effectively to make the best out of the situation. This kind of attitude is greatly responsible for flourishing in life.

Indian scriptures have it written years ago that a calm and one-pointed mind, one that is aware and in control of one's emotions and reactions to situations, is the one who can have a flourishing life. This ability can be enhanced by yoga-based practices, following certain principles like Yamas and Niyamas and practicing meditation for a stable mind.

Today's young population is often encountered emotionally taxing situations that affect their long-term behaviour and outlook toward life. In such a setting, the implementation of YBP can prove to be useful.

Thus the author hypothesises that-

Yoga and Emotional Awareness

H1: Yoga Based Practices are positively related to Emotional Awareness in a healthy young adult population.

Yoga and Self-Regulation

H2: Yoga Based Practices are positively related to Self-Regulation in a healthy young adult population.

Emotional Awareness and Flourishing

H3: Emotional Awareness is Positively related to Flourishing, that is a higher level of Emotional Awareness, a higher level of Flourishing in healthy young adult participants.

Self-Regulation and Flourishing

H4: Self - regulation is Positively related to Flourishing, that is a higher level of Self - Regulation, a higher level of Flourishing in healthy young adult participants.

Direct Effect of Yoga on Psychological Capital

H5: Yoga-based practices have a positive impact on Flourishing directly.

Mediating role of Emotional Awareness and self-regulation to enhance flourishing

H5a: Yoga-based practices have a positive impact on Flourishing mediated by Emotional Awareness.

H5b: Yoga-based practices have a positive impact on Flourishing mediated by Self-Regulation.

Flourishing and Resilience

H6: Flourishing has a positive relationship with Resilience.

METHOD

The study has two parts: the first part is a cross-sectional survey and the second is experimental research. Through the cross-sectional survey, the author tested the hypothesis about the positive association of Emotional Awareness and Self-Regulation with Flourishing. Through the experimental study, the author examined the impact of Yoga interventions on Emotional Awareness, Self-Regulation, Flourishing, and Resilience.

Participants

The study sample for the cross-sectional survey included undergraduates enrolled in professional graduation programs in reputed institutions from urban cities across India. Each participant was asked to complete a background sheet that included demographic information and the different instruments as described below. The author assured participants of confidentiality and anonymity. The author received 179 completed surveys out of the 210 that were distributed.

The experimental study was designed as randomized control research to assess the effect of YBP on Positive Psychological Outcomes. The study was conducted with 70 participants enrolled in professional graduation programs from a reputed institution in Mumbai who voluntarily became a part of this research study. The participants' sample was randomly divided into two equal groups. The author conducted YBP Course sessions for the experiment group. Pre and Post course assessments were done on Emotional Awareness, Self-Regulation, Flourishing, and Resilience with validated standardized instruments.

METHODS AND FINDINGS

The author presents the sample, measurement model, and

findings of study 1. In study 2 as well the author presents the experimental design, and nature of the intervention along with the sample, measurement model, and findings in this section.

Study 1: Sample, Measurement Model, and Findings

Sample

Using the purposive sampling method, the cross-sectional survey included undergraduates enrolled in professional graduation programs from urban cities across India in 2020. The author used an online survey method for data collection. EA, SR, Flourishing, and Resilience were measured in a self-report format. We distributed 210 surveys and received 179 completed and usable surveys. The response rate was 85%.

Measures

The study used measures that have been previously validated in published research.

· **Emotional Awareness** was measured with the self-report scale developed by Mehling, W. E., Price, C., Daubenmier, J. J., Acree, M., Bartmess, E., & Stewart, A. (2012). The multidimensional assessment of interoceptive awareness (MAIA). PloS one, 7(11), e48230. Sample items were, "I notice how my body changes when I am angry." The alpha reliability coefficient was 0.83.

· **Self-Regulation** was measured with the self-report scale developed by Mehling, W. E., Price, C., Daubenmier, J. J., Acree, M., Bartmess, E., & Stewart, A. (2012). The multidimensional assessment of interoceptive awareness (MAIA). PloS one, 7(11), e48230. Sample items were, "When I feel overwhelmed, I can find a calm place inside". The alpha reliability coefficient was 0.82.

· **Flourishing** was measured using 15 PERMA items developed by Butler, J., & Kern, M. L. (2016). The PERMA-Profil: A brief multidimensional measure of flourishing. International Journal of Wellbeing, 6(3), 1-48. doi:10.5502/ijw.v6i3.526. The sample items were, "How often do you feel joyful?" and "How often do you achieve the important goals you have set for yourself?".

· **Resilience** was measured using 14-ITEM Resilience Scale (RS-14) of 2009 Gail M. Wagnild (2009). The sample items were, "I usually manage one way or another." and "When I'm in a difficult situation, I can usually find my way out of it." The alpha reliability coefficient.

Study2: Sample, Experiment Design, Nature of Intervention, Measurement Model, and Findings

Sample

The sample included 70 graduate students enrolled in the Bachelor of Dental Surgery from Mumbai, India.

Experiment Design

The experimental study was designed with randomized control and experimental groups. The 70 students volunteered for this study and they were randomly assigned to two sections. The students of one section served as the control group (n = 35) and the students of another section served as the experimental group (n = 35). The students in the experimental group were offered 8 weeks YBP. The assessments took place at two points of time: pre-course (T1), and post-course after 8 weeks (T2) for both the control and experimental groups. The measures used for EA, SR, Flourishing, and Resilience were the same as those in Study 1.

Nature of Intervention: Yoga-Based Practices (YBP)

Protocol

It is mentioned above that Patanjali's eight limbs of Yoga based practices comprise of practices like Yama, Niyama, Asanas, Pranayama, and Meditation. The complete Yoga practice session involved the Epistemology of Yoga with a Scriptural Understanding of Yoga Philosophy and the following Asanas and Pranayam Practices. The choice of Asanas was particularly relevant for the healthy youth population. All the Asanas have had an impact on the overall physique and are not targeted for a specific ailment.

YBP Protocol

The complete Yoga practice session will involve the following activities and lectures:

Preparation : (10 min.)

- Cleansing Process (Shuddhikriya) by Kapaybhati, Tratak
- Opening Prayer (Shanti Mantra)
- Sukshma Vyayam by Shakti Vikasak Series
- Body loosening and stretching by Loosening Practices, Pawanmuktasana Series, Yogamudra, Marjari asana

Asanas: (20 min.)

- Yogic Jogging
- Shashkasana
- Makarasana
- Vakrasana
- Markatasana
- Pshchimittanasana,
- Sarwngasana,
- Halasana,
- Chakrasana,
- Vrikshasana
- Suryanamaskar

Pranayam : (10 min.)

- Breathing Practices
- Deep Breathing
- Sectional Breathing
- Anulom Vilom
- Shitali, Sitkari
- Ujjai
- Bharstika
- Bhramari
- Shambhawi Mudra

Relaxation (5 min.)

- Shavasana and Yoda Nidra

Meditation (5 min.)

- Anapansati, Dharna, Omkar Dhyam

Theoretical Understanding (10 min.)

- Origin, Definition, Mis-understanding of Yoga
- Paths of Yoga : Karma, Bhakti, Dnyan, Hatha, Raj Yog
- Scriptural Understanding of Yoga Philosophy
- Ashthang Yog : Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayam, Pratyahar, Dharna, Dhyam, Samadhi
- Understanding Stress and Stress Management through Yoga

A complete Yoga session was for around 60 min.

The YBP Interventional Protocol involved three (approx.) 60-minute long online and in-person sessions over the course of 8 weeks for an overall total of 24 sessions. The YBP was taught by an expert who is a trained instructor in Yoga and has been practicing it for more than 10 years.

Measurement Model and Findings

In the experiment study, the author administered a self-report scale to every participant. Data was collected at two points. Data was collected before the intervention (T1) and after the intervention (T2). The control group was provided YBP training after T2 in separate sessions.

The findings of the experimental study conducted in phase 2 demonstrated that Yoga based practices enhance both the Emotional Awareness and Self-Regulation of the participants. The research contributes to the literature by explicating the impact of Yoga on positive psychology and illuminates the intersection between the literature on YBP and Positive Psychology. The study has implications for practice as it highlights how positive psychological competencies and traits can be enhanced through YBP.

DATA ANALYSIS

Based on the purpose of the research to analyze causal relationships between YBP, Flourishing, Emotional Awareness, Self-Regulation, and Resilience Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) is adopted. SEM allows the researcher to simultaneously consider relationships among multiple independent and dependent variables.

FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings of the survey indicate the positive association of Flourishing with Emotional Awareness and self-regulation. In the experiment study at the end of the course, there was an increase in the Flourishing scores of the experiment group over the control group. Resilience scores increased significantly in the experiment group. The standard deviation of Flourishing and

Resilience scores have also decreased significantly which shows the positive impact of YBP on the Positive Psychological Outcome.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study design was a cross-sectional survey for part 1 and experimental for part 2 of the research. The experimental design of the second part of the study attempts to provide a longitudinal picture of the relationship, however, two months, which was the duration between the start of the experiment and the measurement, may not be enough to fully explore the impact of YBP on PP Outcome. As an individual's Flourishing develops over a lifetime depending upon Practices and experiences, further research is needed to establish the long-term effect of YBP on PP Outcome.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The present study investigates the importance of YBP in determining the Flourishing of an individual. Further studies should explore the other important antecedents for Positive Psychological Outcomes.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be made:

- **Integration of Yoga-Based Practices:** The results suggest that incorporating yoga-based practices into daily routines can have a positive impact on emotional awareness, self-regulation, flourishing, and resilience. Therefore, it is recommended to promote the integration of yoga-based practices, such as asanas, pranayama, and meditation, into educational institutions, workplaces, and community settings.
- **Mind-Body Wellness Programs:** Developing mind-body wellness programs that incorporate yoga-based practices can be beneficial for young adults. These programs can be

implemented in educational institutions, community centers, and healthcare settings to provide individuals with the tools to manage stress, enhance emotional well-being, and promote positive psychological outcomes.

- **Mental Health Support:** Given the high levels of stress and mental health challenges faced by young adults, it is essential to prioritize mental health support. Integrating yoga-based practices into mental health interventions and therapy sessions can provide individuals with additional coping mechanisms and self-regulation skills.

- **Long-Term Studies:** Conducting long-term studies to examine the sustained effects of yoga-based practices on positive psychological outcomes is recommended. This will provide a clearer understanding of the long-term benefits and the potential for lasting changes in emotional awareness, self-regulation, flourishing, and resilience.

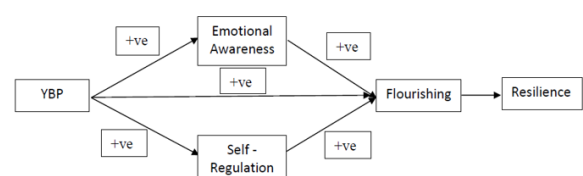
- **Diverse Populations:** Expanding research to include diverse populations beyond young adults pursuing professional graduation programs is important. Investigating the effects of yoga-based practices on positive psychological outcomes in different age groups, cultural backgrounds, and populations with specific needs will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of its effectiveness.

- **Mechanisms and Process:** Further research should explore the underlying mechanisms and processes through which yoga-based practices influence positive psychological outcomes. This will help identify the specific components of yoga-based practices that are most impactful and inform the development of targeted interventions.

- **Training and Education:** Providing training and education for professionals in fields such as education, psychology, and healthcare on the benefits and implementation of yoga-based practices is crucial. This will equip them with the knowledge and skills to integrate yoga-based practices into their respective fields and support individuals in achieving positive psychological well-being.

By implementing these recommendations, individuals, communities, and institutions can harness the potential of yoga-based practices to enhance emotional awareness, self-regulation, flourishing, and resilience, ultimately promoting holistic well-being and positive psychological outcomes.

Figure 1: Hypothesized Relationships



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