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Effect of Yoga Practice on Mental Health and Anxiety of College Students of Varanasi

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Abstract

This study examined the effect of regular yoga practice on mental health and anxiety among college students in Varanasi City. A sample of 80 students aged 20–25 years was categorized into regular yoga practitioners and non-practitioners. Mental health and anxiety were assessed using the Mental Health Inventory (MHI) and Sinha's Comprehensive Anxiety Test (SCAT-SS). Results indicated that students practicing yoga regularly showed significantly better mental health ($M = 133.52$, $SD = 4.26$) than non-practitioners ($M = 120.06$, $SD = 3.82$), along with significantly lower anxiety levels ($M = 27.65$, $SD = 3.84$ vs. $M = 35.24$, $SD = 4.17$). The findings suggest that regular yoga practice plays a significant role in enhancing mental well-being and reducing anxiety among young adults. Incorporating yoga into daily routines may therefore be an effective strategy for promoting emotional resilience and mental health in college students.

Keywords: Yoga, Mental Health, Anxiety, Students, Varanasi

Introductions

Mental health is a crucial component of overall well-being, particularly during young adulthood, a period marked by significant academic, social, and emotional challenges. College students often experience heightened levels of stress, anxiety, and emotional instability due to academic pressure, career uncertainty, competition, and changing social relationships. In recent years, concerns regarding deteriorating mental health among college students have increased globally, making it essential to explore effective, accessible, and non-pharmacological interventions that can enhance psychological well-being and reduce anxiety.

Yoga, an ancient Indian practice rooted in holistic health principles, has gained widespread recognition for its positive effects on physical, mental, and emotional health. It integrates physical postures (asanas), breathing techniques (pranayama), meditation, and relaxation practices that collectively promote mind–body balance. Scientific research has increasingly supported yoga as an effective intervention for reducing stress, anxiety, depression, and improving overall mental health. Regular practice of yoga is believed to enhance emotional regulation, self-awareness, concentration, and resilience, which are particularly beneficial for students facing academic and personal stressors.

In the Indian context, especially in culturally rich cities like Varanasi, yoga holds both traditional and contemporary relevance. Despite its availability and cultural acceptance, many college students do not engage in regular yoga practice, potentially missing its mental health benefits. Given the rising prevalence of anxiety and mental health concerns among students, it becomes important to empirically examine the role of yoga in promoting psychological well-being within this population.

Mental health encompasses an individual's ability to cope with daily stressors, maintain emotional balance, and function effectively in personal, social, and academic domains. Anxiety, on the other hand, is one of the most common psychological problems among students and can adversely affect academic performance, interpersonal relationships, and quality of life. Persistent anxiety may also lead to more severe mental health issues if left unaddressed.

The present study aims to investigate the effect of regular yoga practice on mental health and anxiety among college students of Varanasi. By comparing students who practice yoga regularly with those who do not, the study seeks to highlight the psychological benefits of

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yoga practice. The findings are expected to provide valuable insights for educators, mental health professionals, and policymakers, emphasizing yoga as a practical and cost-effective strategy for improving mental health and reducing anxiety among college students. Ultimately, promoting yoga-based interventions in educational institutions may contribute to healthier, more emotionally resilient young adults.

Review of Literature

Mental health concerns, particularly anxiety and stress, are increasingly prevalent among college students due to academic pressure, career uncertainty, and social challenges. In recent years, yoga has gained recognition as an effective mind–body intervention for improving psychological well-being among young adults.

Sharma and Gupta (2019)^[4] examined the impact of regular yoga practice on mental health among Indian college students and found significant improvements in emotional stability, self-confidence, and overall psychological well-being. Their findings suggest that yoga enhances adaptive coping mechanisms, thereby reducing mental distress.

Telles *et al.* (2020)^[7] investigated the effects of yoga-based interventions on anxiety and stress levels among university students. The study reported a significant reduction in anxiety symptoms and perceived stress after eight weeks of structured yoga practice, highlighting yoga's role in regulating autonomic balance and emotional control.

Similarly, Bhavanani (2021)^[1] emphasized yoga's therapeutic value in managing anxiety disorders among youth. The study demonstrated that pranayama and meditation practices significantly reduced anxiety levels and promoted mental clarity, supporting yoga as a complementary mental health strategy in educational institutions.

A study by Singh and Mishra (2022)^[5] focused on mental health outcomes of yoga practice among college students in North India. Results indicated that students who practiced yoga regularly showed better mental health scores, including improved mood and reduced depressive tendencies, compared to non-practitioners.

Kumar *et al.* (2023)^[3] conducted a comparative study on yoga practitioners and non-practitioners among university students and found significantly lower anxiety and stress levels in the yoga group. The researchers concluded that yoga fosters emotional resilience and psychological balance, making it beneficial for student populations.

Most recently, Verma and Srivastava (2024) examined the influence of yoga on anxiety, depression, and mental well-being among graduate students in Uttar Pradesh. The study revealed that consistent yoga practice led to marked improvements in mental health and significant reductions in anxiety, reinforcing yoga's relevance for students in urban academic settings such as Varanasi.

Overall, the reviewed literature consistently supports the positive impact of yoga practice on mental health and anxiety reduction among college students. These findings justify the inclusion of yoga programs in higher education institutions to promote psychological well-being and emotional resilience.

Methodology

Objectives of the Study

The present study was conducted with the following

objectives:

1. To examine the effect of regular yoga practice on the mental health of graduate college students.
2. To study the effect of regular yoga practice on anxiety among graduate college students.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated for the study:

1. Regular yoga practice will have a positive impact on the mental health of graduate college students.
2. Regular yoga practice will significantly reduce anxiety levels among graduate college students.

Sample

The sample for the present study consisted of 80 graduate college students from Varanasi City. The participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique. Among them, 40 students were regular yoga practitioners, while 40 students did not practice yoga regularly. The age of the participants ranged between 20 and 25 years. Regular yoga practitioners were defined as students who had been practicing yoga for at least six months, for a minimum of four to five days per week.

Tools Used in Study

Mental Health Inventory (MHI): The Mental Health Inventory (MHI) was developed by Dr. Jagdish and Dr. A. K. Srivastava to assess the overall mental health status of individuals. The inventory consists of 56 items, each designed to measure different aspects of mental health. Every item provides four response options: *Almost Always True*, *Sometimes True*, *Rarely True*, and *Almost Never True*. These responses are scored in a manner that reflects the respondent's level of mental well-being, with higher scores indicating better mental health.

The reliability of the Mental Health Inventory was established using the split-half method with an odd–even procedure. The overall reliability coefficient of the inventory was found to be 0.73, indicating satisfactory internal consistency and dependability for research purposes.

Sinha's Comprehensive Anxiety Test (SCAT-SS):

Sinha's Comprehensive Anxiety Test (SCAT-SS) was constructed and standardized by A. K. P. Sinha and L. N. K. Sinha to measure the level of anxiety in individuals. The scale consists of 90 statements, each requiring a dichotomous response in the form of *Yes* or *No*.

Scoring of the SCAT-SS is simple and can be done manually, as no scoring key or stencil is provided. For each response marked *Yes*, the respondent is awarded one point, while a *No* response is scored as zero. The total anxiety score is obtained by summing all affirmative (*Yes*) responses. A higher total score indicates a higher level of anxiety, whereas a lower score reflects a lower level of anxiety.

Procedure

After obtaining consent from the participants, the selected psychological tools were administered individually under standardized conditions. Clear instructions were provided to ensure accurate responses. The collected data were scored according to the respective manuals.

Result and discussion

Table 1: Mean S.D. and t value of mental health among Regular yoga practice and Non-regular yoga practice college students of Varanasi.

Variable	Group	N	Mean (M)	S.D.	t-value	Level of Significance
Mental Health	Yoga Practitioners	40	133.52	4.26	14.877	p <.01
	Non-Yoga Practitioners	40	120.06	3.82		

The results presented in the table indicate a significant difference in mental health between regular yoga practitioners and non-yoga practitioners among college students. Students who practiced yoga regularly demonstrated higher mental health scores ($M = 133.52$, $SD = 4.26$) compared to non-practitioners ($M = 120.06$, $SD = 3.82$). The obtained t-value of 14.877 was found to be statistically significant at the 0.01 level, indicating that the observed difference is unlikely to have occurred by chance. These findings suggest that regular yoga practice has a positive and significant impact on the mental health of college students. Yoga practices, which include physical postures (asanas), breathing techniques (pranayama), and meditation, are known to enhance emotional regulation, reduce psychological stress, and promote overall

psychological well-being. The present result is consistent with earlier studies that reported improved mental health and emotional stability among individuals engaged in regular yoga practice.

Telles *et al.* (2020) ^[7] reported that yoga-based interventions significantly improved mental well-being and reduced psychological distress among university students. Similarly, Sharma and Gupta (2019) ^[4] found that college students practicing yoga exhibited better emotional balance, self-confidence, and mental health compared to their non-practicing counterparts. Singh and Mishra (2022) ^[5] also observed that regular yoga practice was associated with higher mental health scores and reduced depressive tendencies among college students.

Table 2: Mean S.D. and t value of anxiety among Regular yoga practice and Non-regular yoga practice college students of Varanasi.

Variable	Group	N	Mean	S.D.	t-value	Level of Significance
Anxiety	Yoga Practitioners	40	27.65	3.84	8.468	p <.01
	Non-Yoga Practitioners	40	35.24	4.17		

The table shows a significant difference in anxiety levels between yoga practitioners and non-yoga practitioners among college students. Students who practiced yoga regularly reported lower anxiety levels ($M = 27.65$, $SD = 3.84$) compared to non-practitioners ($M = 35.24$, $SD = 4.17$). The obtained t-value of 8.468 was statistically significant at the 0.01 level, indicating that regular yoga practice is associated with a substantial reduction in anxiety. This finding suggests that yoga is an effective intervention for managing anxiety among college students. Yogic practices such as pranayama, meditation, and relaxation techniques help regulate physiological arousal and reduce stress responses, thereby lowering anxiety levels. The result of the present study is consistent with earlier research.

Telles *et al.* (2020) ^[7] found that yoga interventions significantly reduced anxiety and stress among university students by improving autonomic balance and emotional regulation. Similarly, Kumar *et al.* (2023) ^[3] reported lower anxiety scores among college students who practiced yoga regularly compared to those who did not. These studies support the present findings and highlight yoga's role in promoting psychological calmness and emotional stability. Thus, the significant differences in mental health and anxiety observed in the present study are consistent with existing literature and strongly reinforce the role of yoga as an effective mental health-promoting intervention for young adults. Regular yoga practice appears to enhance psychological well-being while significantly reducing anxiety levels among college students. Incorporating yoga into daily routines, academic curricula, or institutional wellness programs may therefore contribute substantially to improving mental health, emotional resilience, and overall well-being in the college student population.

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