

Prevention of mental health disorders: A yogic perspective

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Abstract

This universal prayer of Vedic lineage clearly indicates the concern of community health care because someone with a “healthy mind” has clear thoughts, the ability to solve the problems of daily life, enjoys good relationships with friends, family, and work colleagues, is spiritually at ease, and can bring happiness to others.

Where as Mental Health Disorders can be defined as any illness experienced by a person which affects their emotions, thoughts or behavior, is out of keeping with their cultural beliefs and personality, and produces a negative effect on their lives or the lives of their families. Symptoms of illness can appear in the form of persistent changes in mood, perception of reality, or capacity to organize or maintain thoughts. Such changes will interfere with the person’s usual beliefs, personality or social function.

Results of a recent assessment of 184 of 196 World Health Organization (WHO) member states (representing 95% of WHO member states and 98% of the world’s population) have indicated that there is a growing burden of neuropsychiatric & Psychological disorders and that mental health resources remain insufficient (WHO 2011). Regarding psychosocial interventions, only 44% of countries providing these services. Upper-middle income and high income countries provide more psychosocial care at a majority of facilities (61% and 59% respectively) compared to lower-middle (34%) and low income countries (14%).

Yoga today is gaining popularity, today, yoga has been considered the science of correct living and therefore is intended to the imbibed in daily life. It not just works on any single aspect of a persons life, rather it works on the physical, the emotional, the mental as well as the spiritual level, and yoga is considered a means of harmonizing and balancing the body, emotion and mind.

Keywords: Mental Health Disorders, Yogic Philosophy, Chakras, Pranas.

सर्वे भवन्तु सुखिनः सर्वे सन्तु निरामयाः।
सर्वे भद्राणी पश्यन्तु ना कश्चिद् दुःख भागभवेत्।।

“Mental Health is the psychological state of any individual in which he/she functions at a level of satisfaction of both emotional as well as behavioral adjustment”. From the perspective of the psychology of holism, mental health may include the ability of a person to enjoy different phases of life & also how he/she brings a balance between various activities of life & the efforts for achieving psychological resilience.

The World Health Organization (WHO) further states that the well being of a person is encircled in the awareness of their abilities and potential, coping with daily hassles, productive and benefaction or contribution in the community. Anxiety, loneliness, depression, ADHD, suicidal thoughts, various mood disorders or mental illness of varying degrees may be faced by an individual who is struggling with his/her mental health. It is predicted by WHO that by 2020, depression will be listed as the second major contributor to the global disease, after ischemic heart disease. Anxiety is a diagnosed imbalanced emotion which is also marked as a greater state than it was in the past.

Yoga today is gaining popularity, today, yoga has been considered the science of correct living and therefore is intended to the imbibed in daily life. It not just works on any single aspect of a persons life, rather it works on the physical, the emotional, the mental as well as the spiritual level, and yoga is considered a means of harmonizing and balancing the body, emotion and mind.

This is done through various practices of yoga which include asana, pranayama, bandha mudra, shatkrama and meditation. Shatkarma are the six actions which are also known as shatkriyas. These shatkarma helps in the purification of ones body and helps in keeping the body healthy, peaceful and free from illness.

According to Maharshi Vyas, the meaning of yoga is samadhi. He further elaborates and says that patiently doing meditation to what he calls as sadhna and while doing it, enjoying the precious union of ones soul with the supreme soul is yoga. On the outermost aspect of the personality, the physiological body, the science of yoga begins to work which is the most practical and familiar starting point for some individuals.

The importance of yoga is very well explained through a shlok in **Bhagwat Gita-**

बुद्धियुक्तो जहातीह उभे सुकृतदुष्कृते।
तस्माद्योगाय युज्यस्व योगः कर्मसु कौशलम्।।2.50।।

When any type of imbalance is experienced at this level, different organs, muscles and nerves stop functioning in harmony; instead they act in contrast to each other. For instance, if the endocrine system becomes irregular and its efficiency decreases to an extent that a particular disease will be manifested.

The aim of yoga is to bring different body functions to coordinate perfectly and thus working for the good of whole body. From the physical body, yoga steps on to the mental as well as emotions levels of an individual. There are number of people who get affected seriously of their daily hassles, which results in suffering from phobias and neurosis. A cure for life is not provided by yoga, but it is a proven method for coping with it.⁴ cleansing and strengthening of physical and mental is considered as one of the important achievements of yoga and this quality of yoga makes it powerful and unique as well as effective in a way that it works on the holistic rule of unification medical scientists say that the reason for yoga therapy to be successful is due to its balancing which is created in the nervous system as well as in the endocrine system. These are very important systems considered within an individuals body as a direct influence of these systems is seen on other systems of the body. In this paper, it is aimed to provide evidence for yoga as a form of health promotion, illness prevention and treatment for depression and other mental health imbalances.

Like other therapies, yoga is not a complete solution to mental health concerns. In conjunction with other approaches, yoga has a great potential to lead people towards greater mental well-being. As Pantanjali sutra notes; "yoga is the practice of quieting the mind". In the ASHTANG YOGA, yoga has been defined as:

“योगश्चित्तवृत्तिनिरोधः”

Positive mental health is seen as a state within a individual in which he/she realize his/her full potential as well as abilities, the way in which one can cope up with situations and with normal stresses of daily routine, and ones ability of contributing fruitfully in ones community.⁵ There have been reported treatment of different mental health disorders which includes disorders like major depression disorder (MDD), obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), anxiety disorder etc. Treatment of depression has been reported as the most significant results.

Ross Thomas in his book The health benefits of yoga and exercise: A review of comparison studies [2010] writes about a study in which it was found that yoga is as effective or better than exercise at improving a variety of mental health measures such as- Stress, Quality of Life, Mood, Heart Rate variability, Pulmonary Function and so on.⁶ K Pilkington and H Rampus in their book "Yoga for depression" [2005] mentioned that in the treatment of mild to moderate MDD, promising results indicate that yoga may be applied as monotherapy.

In the Ashtang yoga it is described that through the path of yoga we not only achieve our physical, mental and spiritual health, but also the highest aim of our life i.e. oneness with the supreme being-

“तदा द्रष्टुः स्वरूपेऽवस्थानम् ॥३॥”

The positive effect of yoga on the nervous system, the gene

expression as well as the cardiovascular system is seen to be hypothesized in various researches. An increase in parasympathetic activity of the autonomic nervous system is seen when the vagal nerve is stimulated, this in turn increases the GABA activity in the brain.⁷

The breath is considered as a connector or bridge between mind and body. In almost all forms of yoga, there is one particular type of breathing which is very common and is known as slow diaphragmatic breathing. This type of breathing in yoga helps in regaining mental stability, tranquility and calmness. While one perform yogasanas, his/her respiration and metabolic rates slow down, there is a drop in body temperature and consumption of oxygen. On the other hand, the breath and metabolism speed up with a rise in oxygen consumption also, the body gets hot when one performs exercise. Postures of yoga tend to arrest catabolism, whereas it is promoted by exercise.

There is specific effect on internal organs and glands as a result of different yogasanas, which are also design to alter the electrochemical activity that takes place in the nervous system. There are various shloks written in Hindu Mythology that describes the benefits of Vyayam-

**व्यायामात् लभते स्वास्थ्यं दीर्घायुष्यं बलं सुखं ।
आरोग्यं परमं भाग्यं स्वास्थ्यं सर्वार्थसाधनम् ॥**

In asans, the flow of adrenaline is influenced by shashankasana which is responsible for fight or flight mechanism PRANA the vital energy, which pervades the entire body, that follows a flow pattern, called "NADIS", are the ones known for the maintenance of a person cellular activity. A resultant collection of toxins and blocked prana causes stiffness in the body. With the help of prana vaayu, all the toxic elements get removed this helps in keeping the whole body in a good health. The evolutionary energy in a person is considered as kundalini shakti. The awakening of which is regarded to be the principle aim of yoga.

Practicing of various asans help in stimulating the CHAKRAS, and the energy generated by kundalini is distributed over the body. There are around 35 asans that are specifically meant to this particular purpose. For instance, chakrasana for manipura chakra, sarvangasana for vishuddhi, sheershasana for sahastrara and so on. The mind and body are not different units, although there is a tendency to think and act as though they are. Both the body and the mind harbor knots. Every mental knot is seen to have a corresponding physical and muscular knot and vice versa. These knots are released by asanas and they further release the mental tensions by dealing with them on physical level acting somato- physically, through the body to the mind. For eg- The proper work of lungs can be blocked or tightened up due to emotional tensions and suppression, this in turn may result in different debilitating illness like respiratory disorders.⁸

According to SWAMI SIVANANDA, "In the pranayama practices more emphasis is given to inhalation and exhalation at the beginning, in order to strengthen the

lungs and balance the nervous and pranic systems in preparation for the practice of kumbhaka.

These initial practices influence the flow of prana in the nadis, purifying, regulating and activating them, thereby inducing physical and mental stability".

In the view of yogic physiology, the framework of human is seen to be made of five bodies or sheaths, that are considered to be responsible for the various aspects of human existence. These five sheath are; ANNAMAYA kosh-the food or material body, MANOMAYA kosha- the mental body, PRANAMAYA kosh- the bioplasmic or vital energy body, VIJNANAMAYA kosh- the psychic or higher mental body, ANANDAMAYA kosh- the transcendental body. Pranayama comprises of five important pranas, which all together are known "PANCH PRANAS" prana, apana, samana, udana and vyana.

The movement of energy which governs the thoracic area that lies between the larynx and the top of the diaphragm is referred as Prana. The heart and the organs along with the muscles and the nerves are associated with this prana. Below the navel region, lies the abdomen, which is governed by Apana. It also provides energy for large intestine, kidneys, anus and genitals. Between the heart and the navel area is located the Samana.

The activation of digestive system which includes the liver, intestine, pancreas and stomach with its secretions is done by Samana. The neck and head is governed by 'Udana' which activates all the sensory receptors such as the eyes, tongue, nose and ears. The limbs and its associated muscles, ligaments, nerves and joints are all harmonized by 'udana'. The 'Vyana is infused in whole body. It regulates and controls all the movements. Although it is very commonly known that breathing is mainly an unconscious process but, at any point of time, conscious control of it may be taken. Consequently, it is said to form a bridge between conscious and unconscious areas of mind. The energy trapped in neurotic, unconscious mental patterns, may be released if the practice of pranayama is done correctly, further, this released energy may be used in creative activities. It is believed that stress triggers neuroendocrine response that causes immune deregulation and altered cytokine production, which could be one of the multifactorial cause of autoimmune diseases.⁹

The word chakra means "wheel" or "circle" named so by the ancient yogis to depict a wheel-shaped vibration of pranic energy. A chakra is pure and continuous energy. It is our prana in motion, a wavelength of vibration in our electromagnetic field that contains our values, feelings, thoughts and childhood imprints. Through Chakra yoga, each of 8 chakras, becomes energized and thus the physical as well as the emotional attributes which are corresponding to that frequency are also energized with our consciousness. The body holds our emotions. A corresponding relation is seen between chakra and the particular emotion related to that chakra. When any emotion is blocked then the chakra that corresponds to that emotion is also blocked. But through the practice of chakra yoga, when the energy starts flowing, the blocks dissolves and the emotions open.

Prana flows through 72,000 channels called nadis, the major three are known as Ida, Pingla and Sushumna. When the breath is dominant in the left nostril, it indicates the flow of ida nadi, when breath is dominant to the right nostril, it indicates the pingla nadi, when the breath is equal in both nostrils, sushumna is active. In a healthy person, the three nadis flow alternatively-ida and pingla for 60-90 minutes each sushumna at the cross over period of a few minutes, all in a balanced manner. Imbalance in the flow of ida-pingla nadis gives rise to various organic and psychological disorders and complications. Similarly, excess flow of ida nadi results in activation of parasympathetic nervous system and excess flow of pingla nadi stimulates the sympathetic nervous system and makes person extremely active and may cause somatic problems.

There are some particular practices in yoga which underlie under pranayama, and helps in establishing a balance between ida, pingla along with clearing the channels and eradicating the harmful toxins, it also increases the vitality of human life and preparing an individual physically and mentally for higher meditation.¹⁰ Life is a little different today. Many of us are sitting at desks for many hours daily. We sit in cars; at home we sit in front of television or may be computer. So we have very less movements in our lives, we need to re-energize ourselves and reconnect with our physical body and mind. Today all our concentration has gone on studying different study materials and sitting for most of the time, the important link between "doing and creating" has slipped from the center. The focus of educational institute on yoga creates pioneer historians and many discussers in this field; thus, followers are created rather than originators. But doing yoga practically not just gives actual proof but also brings originators.

Such people have full faith in their abilities and potential. They become capable of creating their lives beautiful in their own best way. Its an art of living through mental, physical and spiritual path. It allows to achieve stillness and to tap into inner self of consciousness. We all should follow yogic practices as it prepares us mentally in all aspects of living or life at its fullest and facing day to day problems or challenges. Different levels of ones body and mind have been seen to be affected positively through yoga. One can gain positive transformations by the practice of yoga.

Conflict of interest

None.

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