



IJRASET

International Journal For Research in
Applied Science and Engineering Technology



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL FOR RESEARCH

IN APPLIED SCIENCE & ENGINEERING TECHNOLOGY

Volume: 8 Issue: VI Month of publication: June 2020

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.22214/ijraset.2020.6406>

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Psychological Issues during the Current Pandemic and Role of Yoga Reducing Stress

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Abstract: In march 2020 it was announced as a pandemic by world health organisation. This pandemic has affected all including the patients of COVID-19, the healthcare workers taking care of them , other frontline warriors like police and the general population who is at home. This pandemic in a very short span of time has triggered very major factors affecting mental health like job loss, social isolation, financial hardships and economic disruption.

Yoga is a combined complex intervention that provides guidelines or advice for right lifestyle, spiritual practice, physical activity, breathing exercises and meditation. This study is aimed to identify the psychological implications of the COVID-19 through a systematic review of previous studies . The second part of this study is the review of the best suited Yoga practices for the related conditions.

I. INTRODUCTION

Currently the world is facing a pandemic , that has claimed more than 446K lives so far. The first case of coronavirus related respiratory illness appeared in Wuhan, China December 2019. And in march 2020 it was announced as a pandemic by world health organisation. The picture of clinical features of COVID-19 is unclear, but the psychological effects of the condition is quite clear and evident. This pandemic has affected all including the patients of COVID-19, the healthcare workers taking care of them , other frontline warriors like police and the general population who is at home.

This pandemic in a very short span of time has triggered very major factors affecting mental health like job loss, social isolation, financial hardships and economic disruption. In some studies it has been suggested that COVID-19 stress can trigger mild to severe level of psychosocial problems such as depression, anxiety etc.^{i ii} These responses to COVID-19 can affect a large number of people by leading to a chronic psychopathology. These issues need special attention and one of the best and most effective measures in reducing psychological effects of COVID-19 is yoga. Yoga is a combined complex intervention that provides guidelines or advice for right lifestyle, spiritual practice, physical activity, breathing exercises and meditationⁱⁱⁱ.

This study is aimed to identify the psychological implications of the COVID-19 through a systematic review of previous studies . The second part of this study is the review of the best suited Yoga practices for the related conditions.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study is in two parts - systematic review for the implications of COVID-19 and Review study providing solutions.

- 1) Systematic review of the readily accessible, peer-reviewed full articles published on coronavirus (COVID-19) and Psychological health from 11th march 2020 (WHO declared it as pandemic) to 1st may 2020. Protocol was developed using the PRISMA statement. Articles for review were selected from PubMed central and Google scholar. The search terms included Coronavirus AND Psychological health, coronavirus AND mental stress, coronavirus AND Yoga . There was no restriction on the type of the study to be included , but Randomised controlled trials and quantitative studies were preferred. The focus of the review was to obtain information about the effects on the mental health.
- 2) Literature review of the various yogic practices that can help in the prevention and control of the stress.

Primary outcome of the study was to identify the effects of the COVID_19 stress on the psychology of the patient.

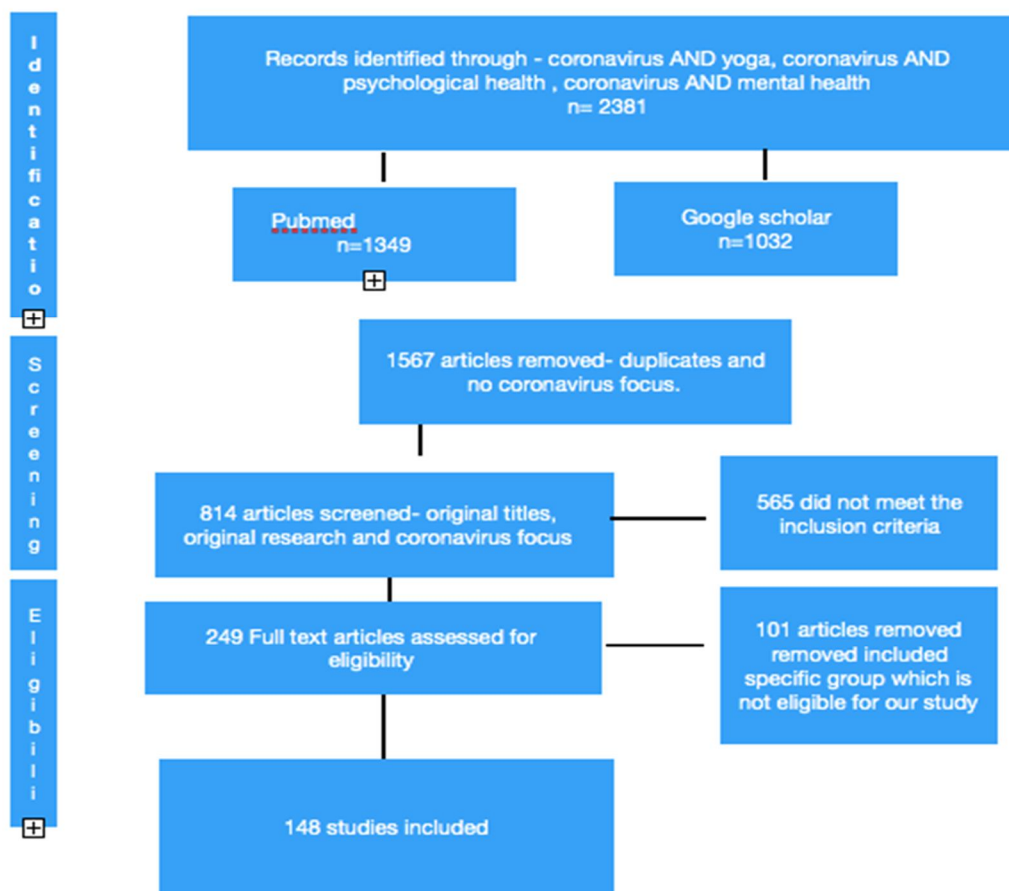
Duplicate articles were removed.

Titles and abstracts were screened , followed by review of full articles. Inclusion and exclusion were recorded following PRISMA guidelines. Critical appraisal checklist^{iv} appropriate to the study design was applied. As this is a review of peer-reviewed published literature , ethical clearance was not required.

III. RESULTS

A. Systematic Review

1) Reason for Exclusion



- a) Language other than English (n=8),
- b) There was no data relating to mental health during COVID-19 period (n=465) these studies basically included the studies on patients already with stress or anxiety before COVID-19,
- c) The population included in the study was very specific (n=56)
- d) Letter to the editor (n=9)
- e) Call for papers (n=6)
- f) Included other systems (n=20)
- g) Totally unrelated to the search terms in the full article (n=10)

B. Psychological Conditions Found in the Included Studies

- 1) Stress (n=127)
- 2) Depression (n=130)
- 3) Anxiety (115)
- 4) PTSD (n=67)
- 5) Professional burnout (n=7)
- 6) Increased smoking and drinking (n=45)
- 7) Sleep disturbances (n=87)
- 8) Insomnia (n=38)

- 9) Obsessive compulsory disorder (n=10)
- 10) Phobic anxiety (n=04)
- 11) psychotism (n= 02)

IV. YOGA AS AN INTERVENTION

Yoga is part of Indian culture from past 5000 years, it is a life discipline to maintain the harmony of mind, body and soul^v. Yogic practices are easily adapted for a wide range of practitioners—including frail seniors and individuals with medical problems for whom other physical activity may be difficult. Yoga is practiced not only to maintain wellness, and but also to treat specific health conditions^{vi}. Depression consistently ranks among the most common health conditions self-treated with yoga^{vii}. Other mind-body therapies frequently used by the public to self-treat depression include breathing exercises, meditation, and relaxation techniques, all comprising key elements of yoga practice. The appeal of yoga as a treatment for depression may be related to its relatively low cost, ease of access, high social acceptance, and the perception that yoga “focuses on the whole person—mind, body, and spirit”^{viii}

A. Yoga for Stress

Stress is one of the commonest and most under acknowledged condition. In the context of stress all three practices of *Hatha Yoga*, *Asana* (physical postures), *Pranayama* (breathing exercises) and *Dhyana* (meditation) are beneficial. Stress affects the physical health especially by affection the immune system^{ix}. Hence asanas are required to strengthen the immune system and remove stress from the body.

- 1) *Tadasana*- helps in restoring the alignment and posture thus improves flow of *Pranic* energy.
- 2) *Kurma Asana* - supports the thymus gland which is an important part of the immune system.
- 3) Chest openers - which improves the breathing thus helping in providing sufficient flow of oxygen to blood. *Ardh Chakrasana* (half wheel pose), *Gomukhasana* (cow pose), *Ushtrasana* (camel pose), *Bhujangasana* (cobra pose).
- 4) Balancing poses - Practices for improving Concentration. *Vrukshasana* (Tree pose), *Veerasana* (hero pose), *Veer Bhadrasana* (warrior pose), *Garudasana* (eagle pose), *Natraj Asana* (dancers pose).
- 5) Restorative - designed to provide support and help the body relax during asana practices, helps by benefitting during low energy period. *Balāsana* (child pose), *Savasana* (corpse pose), *Supta veerasana* (reclining hero pose).
- 6) *Pranayama* (Breathing exercise) - helps in removing stress with the help of control over breathing. Breathing control helps reduce excessive thoughts, thus helps in calming of the mind^x.
- 7) *Dhyana* (meditation) - meditation helps in concentrating the mind. Brings focus of mind from outside the world to inside.

V. CONCLUSION

Mental and psychological problems have emerged as a bigger problem than the health issues during this pandemic. Yoga is a science that is widely accepted and has no side-effects. Hence yoga can be used as an intervention during this pandemic to fight the pandemic of psychological issues.

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