

YOGA FOR CHILDREN

Dr. Rajib Mondal

Assistant Professor in Education

Sundarban B.Ed College, Halderchak, W.B

Dr. Pranati Mistry

Assistant Professor in Education

Ashok Niloy Nivedita College of Education, Ullon, W.B

Dr. Md. Masudel Hossain

Principal, Sundarban Minority B.Ed College, North 24 Parganas, W.B

Dr. Probir Halder

Assistant Professor in History

Dhali Institute of Teacher Education, Hasnabad, N 24 Pgs, W.B

Dr. Raju Sha

Assistant Professor in History

Kharagpur Tribal B.Ed Training College, Matkatpur, Paschim Medinipur, W.B

Dr. Soma Rahaman

Assistant Professor in History

Barasat Subhash Chandra College of Education, North 24 Parganas, W.B

ABSTRACT

This article discusses yoga as a potential tool for children to deal with stress and regulate themselves. Yoga provides training of mind and body to bring emotional balance. Yoga means 'union' or 'connection'. In Sanskrit, the word 'yoga' is used to signify any form of connection. Yoga is both a state of connection and a body of techniques that allow us to connect to anything. Conscious connection to something allows us to feel and experience that thing, person, or experience. Yoga means 'union' or 'connection'. In Sanskrit, the word 'yoga' is used to signify any form of connection. Yoga is both a state of connection and a body of techniques that allow us to connect to anything. Conscious connection to something allows us to feel and experience that thing, person, or experience. The experience of connection is a state of yoga, a joyful and blissful, fulfilling experience. The experience of connection is a state of yoga, a joyful and blissful, fulfilling experience. Children need such tools to listen inward to their bodies, feelings, and ideas. Yoga may assist them in developing in sound ways, to strengthen themselves, and be contributing social beings. How children and young people in today's world face numerous expectations and constant stimulation through the Internet and other media and communication technologies. One reason why children experience stress and mental health challenges is that globalization exposes the youth all over the world to various new demands, standards, and options. There is also increased pressure to succeed in school, partly due to

increased competition but also a diverse range of options available for young people in contemporary times than in the past. Yoga improves children's physical and mental well-being. Similarly, yoga in schools helps students improve resilience, mood, and self-regulation skills pertaining to emotions and stress.

Keywords: Children, Mental health, Childhood, yoga

INTRODUCTION

Yoga is a science, that is, it is a body of techniques that lead us to consciously connect with ourselves and with life, the experience of yoga. As yoga is a science, there is no dogma or belief system attached to it. Yoga simply tells us to do a certain practice and then to feel the effect of that practice, e.g. if we breath slowly in a relaxed manner we will slow our heart rate; if we focus the mind we will develop mental peace and deep insight. The great sage Patanjali, in the system of Raja Yoga, gave one of the best definitions of yoga. He said, 'Yoga is the blocking (*nirodha*) of mental modifications (*chitta vritti*) so that the seer (*drashta*) re-identifies with the (higher) Self. Patanjali's system has come to be the epitome of Classical Yoga Philosophy and is one of the 6 or 7 major philosophies of India. This article discusses yoga as a potential tool for the youth to deal with stress and to regulate themselves. Yoga provides training of mind and body to bring emotional balance. It is claimed that yoga leads to alignment and harmony. A recent thesis suggests that yoga is a tool to listen to your heart. We argues that children and young people need such aid to listen inward, to their bodies, feelings, and ideas. Thus, yoga may contribute to healthy development and good mental health; health promotion for children needs to include improvement of their attention, self-esteem, empowerment, and self-regulation. We believe that children and adolescents need to develop based on their unique personalities, and to interpret and achieve the balance between their own strengths and societal expectations. Yoga may assist them in developing in sound ways, to strengthen themselves, and be contributing social beings. Kundalini yoga is the science of liberating the dormant potential energy in the base of the spine (*kundalini*). The definition of yoga in kundalini yoga is the union of the mental current (*ida*) and the pranic current (*pingala*) in the third eye (*ajna chakra*) or at the base chakra (*muladhara chakra*). This unifies duality in us by connecting body and mind and leads to the awakening of spiritual consciousness. At its most practical level yoga is a process of becoming more aware of who we are. Yoga techniques facilitate balance and health, and unfold our dormant potential. Yoga allows us to be more aware of ourselves and feel connected. As such, yoga is a process of self-discovery. This leads us to self-mastery and self-realization. Children are quite good at hiding their distress and emotional stress from their parents, since they do not want their parents to worry on their account. They desire to please their parents by their "appropriate" and "socially right" behaviors. Children dislike upsetting their parents and being the reason for adding to existing parental stress. According to a constructivist approach, children actively participate in their own development process. Moreover, children and young people interact with everyday life situations with world views that could be different from those of adults. In line with this theory, we believe that children function as an agency for their own well-being and have the evolving capacity to be partners of

wellness with their families, friends, and society. However, children depend on the environment set by society to facilitate their potential for development.

Yoga has been practiced for thousands of years as a life philosophy to join the individual self with what practitioners call the Divine, Universal Spirit, or Cosmic Consciousness. However, very few individuals in the United States as of 2004 practiced yoga in this way; rather, yoga is performed as part of an **exercise** program to increase general health, reduce stress, improve flexibility and muscle strength, and alleviate certain physical symptoms, such as chronic **pain**. Because yoga is a low-impact activity and can include gentle movements, it is commonly used as part of physical therapy and rehabilitation of injuries.

Clinical and psychological studies have demonstrated that performing yoga has the following benefits:

- Physical postures strengthen and tone muscles, and when performed in rapid succession, can provide cardiovascular conditioning.
- Meditation and deep breathing can reduce stress, thereby lowering blood pressure and inducing relaxation.
- Mind/body awareness can influence mood and **self-esteem** to improve quality of life.

In addition to exercise and stress reduction, yoga is also used therapeutically to help children and adolescents with medical conditions. Yoga instructors experienced in adapting yoga postures for individuals with special needs teach yoga to children and adolescents with **Down syndrome**, **cerebral palsy**, seizure disorders, **spinal cord injury**, multiple sclerosis, **cancer**, **autism**, Asperger's syndrome, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), psychiatric disorders, learning disabilities, and other disabilities to help improve physical and mental functioning. Many physicians may recommend yoga for patients with **hypertension**, **asthma**, stress-related disorders, and depression. Growing interest in alternative and complementary medicine has increased the popularity of yoga in the United States and spurred research into its medical benefits. Many hospitals offer alternative or integrative medicine centers that include yoga classes.

Some yoga instructors have even pioneered yoga for infants and toddlers, practiced with one or both parents. Yoga for infants and toddlers can improve **sleep**, ease digestive problems, facilitate neuromuscular development, strengthen the immune system, deepen parent-child bonds, serve as an outlet for creative **play** and self-expression, and reduce stress and **anxiety** for both parents and children.

Children also suffer from bullying (at school and cyber bullying), behavioral issues, problems with attention and self-regulation [such as ADHD and attention deficit disorder (ADD)], sleep disorders, obesity, computer dependency, drug abuse, and lack of school motivation, even leading to dropouts. Recent dropout rates in high schools are close to 30%, despite several years of political priority and designated measures in both the EU and the United States (US). Furthermore, schools are faced with the challenge that students (especially boys) are more attracted to the Internet, social media, and gaming than the school curriculum.

Yoga originated in ancient India and is considered one of the longest surviving philosophical systems in the world. Some scholars have estimated that yoga is as old as 5,000 years; artifacts detailing yoga postures have been found in India from over 3000 B.C. A recent poll conducted

by *Yoga Journal* found that 11 million Americans do yoga at least occasionally and 6 million perform it regularly.

yoga is the most commonly practiced branch of yoga in the United States, and it is a highly developed system of nearly 200 physical postures, movements, and breathing techniques. The yoga philosophy maintains that the breath is the most important facet of health, as the breath is the largest source of "prana," or life force, and hatha yoga uses "pranayama," which literally means the science or control of breathing.

A typical hatha yoga routine consists of a sequence of physical poses, called asanas, and the sequence is designed to work all parts of the body, with particular emphasis on making the spine supple and increasing circulation. Each asana is named for a common thing it resembles, like the sun salutation, cobra, locust, plough, bow, eagle, tree, and the head to knee pose, to name a few. Poses named after animals are especially appealing to children, and children's yoga programs focus on those poses that mimic animals and trees. Each pose has steps for entering and exiting it, and each posture requires proper form and alignment. A pose is held for some time, depending on its level of difficulty and one's strength and stamina, and the instructor cues participants when to inhale and exhale at certain points in each posture, as breathing properly is a fundamental aspect of yoga postures. Breathing should be deep and through the nose. Mental concentration in each position is also very important, which improves awareness, poise, and posture. During a yoga routine there is often a position in which to perform meditation, called *dyana*, if deep relaxation is one of the goals of the sequence.

Yoga routines can take anywhere from 20 minutes to two or more hours, with one hour being a good time investment to perform a sequence of postures and a meditation. For children, 30 minutes may be the maximum span of attention for practicing yoga. Some yoga routines, depending on the teacher and school, can be as strenuous as the most difficult workout, especially those called *ashtanga*, or power, yoga. Other routines merely stretch and align the body while the breath and heart rate are kept slow and steady. Power yoga is only appropriate for children and adolescents who have practiced yoga for some time, or who are engaged in advanced athletic activities. Yoga achieves its best results when it is practiced as a daily discipline, and yoga can be a life-long exercise routine, offering deeper and more challenging positions as a practitioner becomes more adept. The basic positions can increase a person's strength, flexibility, and sense of well-being almost immediately, but it can take years to perfect and deepen them, which is an appealing and stimulating aspect of yoga for many.

Children and adolescents with injuries, medical conditions, or spinal problems should consult a physician before beginning yoga. For children with special needs, parents should find a yoga teacher who is properly trained and experienced and can give children individual attention. Certain yoga positions should not be performed by a person who has a fever or is menstruating. Children and adolescents who are beginners at yoga should always be properly supervised, since injuries are possible, and some advanced yoga postures, like the headstand and full lotus position, can be difficult and require strength, flexibility, and gradual preparation. Proper form and alignment should always be maintained during a stretch or posture, and the stretch or posture should be stopped if pain, dizziness, or excessive fatigue occurs.

While yoga can be used therapeutically to help alleviate certain symptoms in children with various medical conditions, it is not a cure. A physician should be consulted for standard medical treatment.

Current scenario is challenging for both teachers and parents, as well as for children, to foster a positive mental health status. The transition from early childhood to youth and adulthood can be demanding in itself. In the midst of dealing with physical changes, children also have to develop their own identity, increase their autonomy from their parents, and handle changing peer relations. The pressure on young people also varies, encompassing academic, commercial/marketing, and relational issues, as well as succeeding in school, being popular, having a fit or slim body, wearing the right brands of clothes, and owning the latest technological gadgets, etc. This set of expectations creates stress, which impacts children and young people's mental health and well-being, as well as hampers their school performance [see Ref.

Children also suffer from bullying, behavioral issues, problems with attention and self-regulation [such as ADHD and attention deficit disorder (ADD)], sleep disorders, obesity, computer dependency, drug abuse, and lack of school motivation, even leading to dropouts. Recent dropout rates in high schools are close to 30%, despite several years of political priority and designated measures in both the EU and the United States (US). Furthermore, schools are faced with the challenge that students (especially boys) are more attracted to the Internet, social media, and gaming than the school curriculum. Modern society also offers innumerable distractions and undesired attractions, especially linked to modern media and communication technologies, on which we have become dependent. The massive presence of media and the time spent on media technologies by children are clear indicators of the shift in lifestyles and priorities of our new generation. In the US, children spend over seven and a half hours daily using media devices an alarmingly large average, yet rather matter of fact in 2013. Children worldwide are spending more and more time in front of television sets or computer screens and on cell phones, making media a central part of their lives. Young people today are expected to be and are often constantly online. Advertising, communications, as well as education present a brand new social networking image to make media accessible to children.

The ancient practice of yoga may help children and young people cope with stress and thus contribute positively to mental health. In a recent book on yoga education in India, the author claims that "in a nutshell, yoga is a powerful medium for developing the personality of children and making them capable of facing the present-day challenges and problems". In her review article, "Effect of Yoga on Mental Health in Children," one of the world's most prominent yoga researchers, Shirley Telles, concludes that yoga improves children's physical and mental well-being. Similarly, the Harvard professor Sat Bir Khalsa finds that yoga in schools helps students improve resilience, mood, and self-regulation skills pertaining to emotions and stress. Thus, yoga is an important life skill tool for children and young people to cope with stress and self-regulation in a life-long perspective.

The increased global interest in yoga in recent decades is primarily due to the expectancy that yoga can calm the mind and increase overall health and well-being. Children's mental health and well-being include developing healthy relationships with peers and teachers, and being

able to self-regulate emotionally, mentally, and behaviorally. Yoga is an ancient Indian practice, which has been spread all over the world, and is even being revitalized in India itself. Yoga consists of certain postures, regulated breathing techniques, hand poses, and meditation. There is experiential knowledge on which poses are appropriate for different bodily functions. Yoga's positive impact on the physical and mental health of individuals and their well-being has been an established truth in the ancient as well as contemporary yoga literature.

Yoga can be an appropriate scientific intervention in childhood and youth as a stress alleviator, especially in the school setting. The mentioned study conducted by Khalsa on high school students does provide evidence of yoga's positive influence on them for emotional balance and stress alleviation. Yoga is also expected to help younger children and youth increase self-regulation and thus, facilitate their well-being, positive social interactions, and school performance. Other academic research suggests that yoga has significant health potentials and is especially beneficial for coping with stress. A meta-analysis of articles suggests that "a growing body of evidence supports the belief that yoga benefits physical and mental health via down-regulation of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis and the sympathetic nervous system". The use of yoga among children may assist their development, increase their well-being, reduce everyday stress, facilitate weight management, and mitigate emotional and behavioral problems, aside from being a supplement to improve focus and attention.

The beauty of yoga is that its benefits are available to students of every school-age group," according to Henningsen. She discusses how yoga can be a comprehensive approach to stress, something which is needed in the often tension-filled lives of children today [see also Ref. Yoga can help foster motivation, cultivate internal locus of control, improve sleep, and generally encourage healthy and balanced living. Yoga may also aid in shifting self-awareness inward to children's own cues and emotions, and thus, counteract negative social and cultural influences, including the current media pressure to be always online and available. As yoga often results in improved focus and concentration, regular practice is frequently accompanied by better academic performance. Yoga has also been shown to help children with attention problems, as well as to support executive function development. A number of studies have also suggested that yoga can assist children with special needs.

Yoga has been found to have physiological benefits for children through rehabilitation processes. Clinical studies also indicate that yoga improves academic performance and emotional balance. The mental benefits of yoga relate to calming the heart rate, which signals the brain to activate the parasympathetic nervous system. Similarly, yoga can guide relaxation because it reduces sympathetic activity. The sympathetic nervous system (fight or flight) is often engaged when children, similar to adults, are exposed to sensory overload. However, when the parasympathetic nervous system is activated, it increases our ability to focus and learn. Yoga is also said to reduce anxiety in young people as well as in seniors. Thus, yoga may assist healthy development and life-long learning.

As already mentioned, yoga has been recommended to promote mental health and to increase resilience and self-regulation. It has been researched in areas such as life-span development, human attachment, elderly subjects, consciousness, as well as in the medical and psychological fields. We think that what is still needed is a set of recommendations on how to introduce yoga

into children and young people's lives, based on a cultural perspective on child development and childhood sociology. Yoga is often promoted as a universal good discipline, with philosophy and practice to achieve balance and human development. Still, the pedagogy of yoga needs to be context specific and adjusted to the specific audiences of practitioners.

yoga could provide tools for children and young people to remain centered or regain focus, so they may cope with the stress and challenges they experience in their everyday lives. Such tools are needed in the world and societies where children are born into today. The yoga interventions should ideally be evidence-based when possible; to be accompanied by empirical research and user participation. Research projects need to be multi-disciplinary and preferably consist of both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies in order to develop this field of yoga research.

REFERENCES

- 1) Cohen, L., et al.(2004). "Psychological Adjustment and Sleep Quality in a Randomized Trial of the Effects of a Tibetan Yoga Intervention in Patients with Lymphoma." *Cancer* 100: 2253–2260.
- 2) Cooper, S., et al. (2003)."Effect of Two Breathing Exercises (Buteyko and Pranayama) on Asthma: A Randomized Controlled Trial." *Thorax* 58): 674–79.
- 3) Leschin-Hoar, C. "Seeking Yoga's Soothing Touch: Many Say Children with Medical Issues Benefit from its Use." *Boston Globe* November 20, 2003.
- 4) Langien, L.J. (2013). "Pay Attention – Listen to Your Heart!" *Unfolding Practice, Change Realities and Awareness of the Embodied Self in Ashtanga Yoga* [Ph.D. thesis]. Trondheim: Norwegian University of Science and Technology;
- 5) Nayar US, Bhide A.(2008). Contextualizing media competencies among young people in Indian culture: interface with globalization. In: Drotner K, Livingstone S, editors. editors. *The International Handbook of Children, Media and Culture*. London: Sage Publications; p. 325–8
- 6) Livingstone S. *Young People, New Media*.(2002). *Childhood and the Changing Media Environment*. London: Sage.
- 7) Telles S. (2012).*The Effect of Yoga on Mental Health of Children*. In: Nayar U, editor. editor. *Child and Adolescent Mental Health*. New Dehli: Sage Publications; . p. 219–27