
ROLE OF YOGA IN STRESS MANAGEMENT

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Abstract

A productive workforce is the most crucial factor for the success of an organization. This calls for the overall well-being of the human resources in that organization. On the contrary, stress negatively affects one's health, performance on the job, social life and the relationship with family members. The stress response is a complex emotion that produces physiological changes to prepare one for- fight or flight, i.e., to defend oneself from the threat or flee from it. Stress is something most people deal with on an everyday basis. Stress at the workplace has turned out to be a major concern for various organizations and has reached alarming proportions. Development of stress reduction and stress management programs by the organizations is the need of the hour. In today's highly dynamic and competitive scenario, one is exposed to many stressors in all genres of life. Stress is a silent killer, and prolonged exposure to stress may have harmful effects on physical, psychological, social and behavioral well-being of an individual.

Nevertheless, every problem has a solution. There are different stress management and stress reduction techniques. Yoga is one such technique which is used to cope with stress. Yoga is an ancient, Indian art and science that seeks to promote individual health and well-being through physical and mental exercise and deep relaxation. Preliminary studies suggest that yoga may be beneficial in the treatment of some chronic conditions such as asthma, anxiety, stress, high blood pressure among others.

Keywords: Stress, Stressors, Stress Management, Yoga

Introduction

In the present scenario, which is characterized by a high degree of dynamism and competitiveness, one is exposed to many stressors in all genres of life. Stress is a complex, dynamic process of interaction between a person and his or her life. Stress is a silent killer, and prolonged exposure to stress may have harmful effects on physical, psychological, social and behavioral well-being of an individual.

The term "stress" was firstly introduced into life science by Hans Selye in 1936. The term "stress" is derived from the Latin word "Stringere" which means "to be drawn tight."

According to Stephen P. Robbins (2006), “stress arises from an opportunity, demand, constraint, threat or challenge, when the outcomes of the event are important and uncertain.”

There are no formal coping mechanisms or grievance handling procedures for stress in the organizations. If due attention is not given to the stress of employees at workplace, then it may cost the organization a lot in terms of inefficiency, reduced productivity, increased absenteeism, medical bills, more compensation etc. The events produce distress- the degree of physiological, psychological, and behavioral deviation from healthy functioning. There is also a positive side of stress, called eustress, which refers to the healthy, positive, constructive outcome of stressful events and the stress response. Eustress is a moderate-level of stress, enough to encourage and motivate people so that they can face challenges, achieve goals, and facilitate change successfully in their environment. Employees generally experience stress which deteriorates their job performance and leads to numerous physical and mental health problems. This type of undesirable stress is called distress. Studies reveal that even low or moderate levels of stress can interfere with task performance. Cognitive reactions of stress have also been found to result in the inability to concentrate.

Job stress can be defined as the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker. Job stress can lead to poor health and even injury (Sauter *et al.*, 2002). Work-related stress symptoms include insomnia, sleep disturbances, menstrual disorders, fluctuations in body weight, irritation, and depression (Bauer *et al.*, 2003). Burnard (1991) described how work-related stress has a direct influence on the physical and mental health of mental health professionals and indirectly influences the organization and even the patients. If work-related stress and stress adaptation of mental health professionals was understood in a better way, then necessary steps could have been taken to handle their stress, and to encourage them to perform better. It is, therefore, important to employ effective stress management techniques in order to ensure a stress-free workforce which would enhance the productivity of the organization. Yoga is one such technique which is helpful in managing stress.

The conceptual background of yoga has its origin in ancient Indian philosophy as yoga is known to be about 5,000 years old. Yoga is an ancient discipline that has been passed on to us by the ancient sages of India. Early references to yoga are found in the spiritual texts of the Vedas, Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita. Patanjali's Yoga Sutras (the Eightfold Path) are still widely studied and practiced today. The Sutras form the basis of much of the modern yoga movement. The three major cultural branches of Yoga are Hindu Yoga, Buddhist Yoga, and Jain Yoga. Within each of these great spiritual cultures, Yoga has assumed various forms.

Yoga is a science which strives to bring balance and health to the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of an individual. Yoga is often depicted metaphorically as a tree, comprising eight aspects, or limbs: yama (universal ethics), niyama (individual ethics), asana (physical postures), pranayama (breath control), pratyahara (control of the senses), dharana (concentration), dhyana (meditation), and samadhi (bliss).

There are several modern schools or types of yoga (i.e., Iyengar, Viniyoga, Sivananda, etc.), each having its own distinct emphasis regarding the relative content of physical postures and exercises (*asanas*), breathing techniques (*pranayama*), deep relaxation, and meditation practices that create awareness and ultimately more profound states of consciousness. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Yoga began to be used as a therapeutic intervention because of the various psychophysiological benefits of the component practices.

Yoga is a way of life, characterized by balance, health, happiness, and harmony. Yoga practice enables a person to reach a state of mental composure, thereby ensuring that the person has full control over his/her reactions or responses to the external stimuli.

Yoga is a science, a discipline which enables the practitioners to achieve a calm and composed mind, good physical health, continuous spiritual inspiration, and creates the ability for congenial social relationships.

This research study tries to understand the role of yoga in managing and mitigating stress. Various stressors in the present scenario, and the effects of yoga on the stress caused by these stressors are to be identified so as to consider practicing yoga as an effective stress management technique.

Review of Literature

Stress is something most people deal with on an everyday basis. Stress at the workplace has turned out to be a major concern for various organizations and has reached alarming proportions. National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health has reported that job stress is experienced by 80 percent of workers. Walter Bradford Cannon (1932) described stress response as a complex emotion that produces physiological changes to prepare one for- fight or flight, i.e., to defend oneself from the threat or flee from it. This means stress is a complex, emotional response to a threat, resulting in certain physiological changes which either enable a person to face the difficult situation(s), or make the person escape such difficulties. Keeley and Harcourt conducted a study on, "Occupational Stress: A Study of the New Zealand and Reserve Bank," which revealed that stress is caused by heavy work demands in the job itself, which the unskilled employees lacking the required capabilities, cannot adapt to or modify. Kulkarni has made an attempt to identify various stressors in the present scenario in the article "Burnout" published in *Indian Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*. It describes the association of the rapid change in the modern working life with the increasing demands of acquiring new skills, the need to adapt to new kinds/formats of work, continuously striving to raise productivity and improve quality of work, time constraint, and hectic jobs. These factors are increasing stress among the workforce of organizations. According to a study conducted by Atheya and Arora in 2014, stress has a negative impact on the employee's health and work-life balance.

Deshpande (2012) concluded in her study that Yoga, Meditation and Soothing humor have a significantly positive effect on stress. The study also suggested that organizations can employ some creative and innovative practices for Stress Reduction: Annual Day Celebration, Award Ceremonies, Fun Friday, Team Building, Team Outing, Yoga and Meditation, Social Dance, Healing through Music, Themed Events, Festival Celebration, Corporate Events are a few examples. Büssing *et al.*, in their research study, "Effects of yoga on mental and physical health: a short summary of reviews", found yoga to be helpful in improving patient self-efficacy, self-competence, physical fitness, and group support, and effective as a supportive accompaniment to relieve medical conditions, but not yet as a proven stand-alone, curative treatment. Lin *et al.* (2015)

demonstrated a significant mitigation of work-related stress and enhancement of stress adaptation in a group of mental health professionals practicing yoga for 12 weeks. Sharma, Chauhan and Khanna (2011) reported yoga practice to be helpful in alleviating stress among the ITC executives in their study “Stress management through ‘yoga practices’ in the corporate sector.”

Granath *et al.* (2006) carried out a study on “Stress Management: A Randomized Study of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and Yoga.” The results of this study revealed that both cognitive behaviour therapy and yoga are effective in stress management. The results of- “Effect of yoga on academic performance in relation to stress”, a study carried out by Kauts and Sharma, showed that the students who practiced yoga performed better in academics. It also revealed that the students experiencing low stress performed better than those experiencing higher stress. Hence, it was concluded from the findings of the study that stress has a significant effect on the students’ performance. Li and Goldsmith (2012) reported yoga to be beneficial in alleviating stress and anxiety. Chong *et al.* (2011) concluded in their review that yoga had a positive effect on the mitigation of stress in healthy adult populations. Brown and Gerbarg’s (2005) review of clinical studies, their own clinical observations, and guidelines for the safe and effective use of breathing yogic exercises in a wide spectrum of clinical conditions revealed that Yoga practice enhances general well-being, attention, concentration, mood and stress tolerance.

Six months of yogic practices (meditation, asanas, and pranayama) brings a feeling of overall well-being, a reduction in body weight, increased vital capacity, acceleration in endocrinal functions, and improvement in memory. Three months practice of Savasana has demonstrated an improvement in 86 patients, who had problem of headache, insomnia, and nervousness. Udupa *et al.*, found that yoga has the potential to influence the stress disorder and it helps the sufferer to achieve physical and mental stability. Sahasi *et al.*, revealed the effectiveness of yogic techniques in the management of anxiety and stated increased focus and concentration.

Various techniques of yoga- meditation, asanas, and pranayama have been found to positively influence stress management in adolescents. Posadzki *et al.*, concluded in their study that the evidence for the effective

treatment of hypertension by practicing yoga is inspirational but indeterminate.

Yoga has also been found to be effective in reducing stress in pregnancy according to research published in *Complementary Therapies in Clinical Practice*. Svetlana Bershadsky and colleagues from the Department of Psychology and Social Behavior, University of California, Irvine tested the effect of yoga on 51 pregnant women by observing their levels of cortisol (stress hormone) and their mood before and after a yoga session. The results revealed a reduction in stress, improvement in mood and a reduction in postpartum depression symptoms.

Transcendental meditation has been found to reduce stress and improve academic performance. It has also been found that chanting “Om” mentally results in increased alertness, and practicing yoga enhances competitive performance.

The research done by Mind/Body Institute, Harvard Medical School, and Bruce D’Hara and his team at the University of Kentucky in Lexington, U.S., revealed a positive influence of meditation on the functioning of brain and its performance.

Need and Scope of the Study

The study is very important as these days people are stressed from increasing demands at home and work, work-life balance, managing relationships and family responsibilities, job insecurity, time pressure, hectic work schedules, need for continuous upgradation of skills, pressure to raise the productivity and increased competitiveness. Studies reveal that even low or moderate levels of stress can have a negative effect on task performance. Cognitive reactions of stress have also been found to lead to loss of ability to concentrate. Job stress can lead to poor health and even injury (Sauter *et al.*, 2002).

Stressors, the causes of stress, include environmental conditions that place a physical or emotional demand on a person. Stress is a silent killer, and prolonged exposure to stress may have harmful effects on physical, psychological, social and behavioral well-being of an individual.

Yoga is a way of life. It is not merely a tool for stress management but it is also practiced to ensure good physical and mental health and to live a meaningful life. Studies reveal that Yoga helps in mitigating stress, and improves the overall health and well-being of an individual. Thus, the

study aims to identify various stressors present these days, and to understand the role of yoga in alleviating the stress caused by them.

Research Objectives and Methodology

The main aim of the present research study is to review the available literature to identify various stressors in the present scenario, and to understand the role of yoga in reducing and managing stress caused by them.

The study is exploratory in nature, and is based on secondary data collected from various sources like journals, magazines, books, internet etc. Rigorous analysis of the available literature on stress, stress management, yoga and its different forms has been made to ensure the validity and reliability of the conclusions drawn.

Stressors or the various Causes of Stress

Stressors, the causes of stress, include environmental conditions that place a physical or emotional demand on a person. In today's highly competitive, dynamic, fast-changing and globalized world; people experience stress from different sources like from personal life, work or from other personal or social factors. Stress is a consequence of increasing demands at home and work, work-life balance, time constraint, managing relationships and family responsibilities, job insecurity, hectic work schedules, need for continuous learning and skill development, pressure to improve the productivity and increased competition for talent.

Deshpande (2012) in her research study on "A healthy way to handle work place stress through Yoga, Meditation and Soothing Humor" has identified and grouped stressors into the following three categories:

(i) Work-related stressors:

- Inter-personal stressors
- Role-related stressors
- Task-control stressors
- Organizational-physical environment stressors

(ii) Non-work stressors:

- Time-based stressors
- Strain-based stressors
- Role-based conflict stressors

(iii) Individual Differences :

- Personal health stressors
- Knowledge-skill stressors
- Coping skills stressors
- Resilience-work holism stressors

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Role of Yoga in Stress Management

The stress response is a complex emotion that produces physiological changes to prepare one for fight-or-flight, to defend oneself from the threat or flee from it. According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, 80% of the workers experience job stress. Keeley and Harcourt conducted a study on, "Occupational Stress: A Study of the New Zealand and Reserve Bank," which revealed that stress is caused by heavy work demands in the job itself, which the unskilled employees lacking the required capabilities, cannot adapt to or modify. Kulkarni has made an attempt to identify various stressors in the present scenario in the article "Burnout" published in *Indian Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*. It describes the association of the rapid change in the modern working life with the increasing demands of acquiring new skills, the need to adapt to new kinds/formats of work, continuously striving to raise productivity and improve quality of work, time constraint, and hectic work schedules. These factors are increasing stress among the workforce of organizations. Nevertheless, every problem has a solution. There are different stress management and stress reduction techniques. Yoga is one such technique which is used to cope with stress. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Yoga began to

be used as a therapeutic intervention because of the various psychophysiological benefits of the component practices.

Yoga is an ancient, Indian art and science that seeks to promote individual health and well-being through physical and mental exercise and deep relaxation. A person of any age, sex, caste, colour, religion, financial status, health or life condition can practice Yoga and derive its benefits.

Yoga is a body-mind exercise which enhances physical, mental, and spiritual relaxation by way of Asanas- bodily positions of stretching, breathing and meditation (Bhavanani *et al.*, 2014). By practicing yoga, individuals may be able to cope with stress and perform better in highly stressful situations (Louie, 2014). Yoga is a discipline which relaxes and purifies the body, the mind, and the spirit.

Bhole (1977) in his study, explained different aspects of Yoga. Yoga is a way of life, encompassing the philosophy of Karma Yoga (path of detached action), Jnana Yoga (knowledge of self), Bhakti Yoga (trust in the supreme order) and Raja Yoga (asana, pranayama, meditation, etc.). Hatha yoga practices, like asanas (i.e., postures), bandhans (i.e., neuromuscular locks), kriyas (i.e., cleaning processes), mudras (i.e., certain interval attitudes), and pranayama (i.e., breathing practice intended to influence vital forces) are mostly taught as physical practices with the aim of developing a certain type of awareness about self. This leads to a change in emotional and visceral functions which further facilitates a change in intellectual and somatic functions of the individual. Thus, hatha yoga practices are known to be physical practices, whereas, various meditational techniques work at the mental level.

The physical exercises (*asanas*) may increase patient's physical flexibility, coordination, and strength, while the breathing practices and meditation may relax and focus the mind to develop greater awareness and concentration, and reduce anxiety, and thus result in higher quality of life. It may also prove to be helpful in the reduction of distress, blood pressure, asthma, and improvements in strength, mood, and metabolic regulation.

Hatha yoga involves slow stretching of the muscles in exercise alongwith breathing in certain rhythmical patterns. The body positions (asanas) for exercises and meditation can be learned through practice. These asanas are believed to clear the mind, and relax and energize a person. Hatha

Yoga is the most preferred style of Yoga by the Westerners, not merely for relaxation and reduction of stress but also for the diminution of pain during certain illnesses. Hatha yoga may serve as a good choice for stress management. Hatha yoga is one of the most common styles of yoga, and its slower pace and easier movements make it more suitable for the beginners. However, all forms of yoga are beneficial for the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health of individuals, and one can choose to practice any form of yoga based on personal preference. Yoga is also widely recommended for pregnant and nursing women as well as those reaching menopause.

Pranayam (breathing practice) is an exercise of concentration as it involves focusing on breathing in and out of air. Research has confirmed that consciously directed breathing has following benefits: reduced stress, serene mind, sound sleep, lower blood pressure, proper digestion, clear sinuses, smoking cessation, improved sports performances, relief from constipation and headaches, reduced allergy and asthma symptoms, relief from menstrual cramps, and emotional stability.

According to Dean Ornish, in his book, *Reversing Heart Disease*, "almost all of these (stress reduction) techniques ultimately derive from yoga." Yoga integrates the concepts of stretching, controlled breathing, imagery, meditation, and physical movement.

Yoga is a way of life. It is not merely a tool for stress management but it is also practiced to ensure good physical and mental health and to live a meaningful life. Yoga is a system of healing and self-transformation based on wholeness and unity. The word yoga itself means to "yoke"- to bring together. It aims at integrating the varied processes with which we understand the world and ourselves. It touches the physical, mental, psychological, and spiritual domains that we live in. Yoga recognizes that without integration of these, spiritual freedom and awareness, or what the yogis call "liberation," cannot occur.

Yoga has several health benefits, it has the potential for personal and spiritual transformation, and it is easily accessible. These features make it a practical choice for anyone seeking physical, mental, psychological, and spiritual integration. There is a rising interest in Yoga all over the world. Among the numerous different Yoga styles, Hatha yoga is the most familiar to Westerners. It is the path of health which uses breathing

techniques and exercises which involve various postures to improve physical and mental integration.

Various forms of yoga facilitate improvement in focus, concentration, cerebration, self-control and will-power of an individual.

In Britain, yoga practice in the workplace is common. Employers who are concerned about the well-being of their employees and fund exercise programs for their employees have been found to favour yoga practice instead of regular gym membership. Research confirms that a person who is relaxed, has a calm and composed mind, and is physically and mentally healthy will perform better at work.

The yogic postures calm down the nervous system and create sufficient space in the psyche to explore breathing control. It connects the individual with the body's life force, integrating the body and the soul by opening up the spiritual aspects of his or her being.

Yoga is not a religion or a mere exercise, it is a system of integrated techniques and mind frames designed to mitigate stress and bring about a general consonance throughout one's body. This infuses feel-good vibes in the mind and body of an individual. Unlike other good things in the world, Yoga does not come with a side effect.

Yoga, a mind-body practice, is considered one of many types of complementary and integrative health approaches. It converges physical and mental disciplines, thus helping an individual achieve harmony of body and mind. This helps relax and manage stress and anxiety.

Conclusion

Stress has become a part and parcel of the present day's life. Various stressors, viz. increasing demands at home and work, managing relationships and family responsibilities, job insecurity, time constraint, hectic work schedules, work-life balance, need for continuous skill improvement, pressure to raise the productivity and increased competitiveness lead to stressful conditions. Stress has an adverse effect on an individual's physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual well-being. Stress has a negative effect on an individual's health and performance. It can lead to various health and work-related problems. With almost everyone being affected by stress in the present scenario, it necessitates the use of appropriate stress management techniques.

Yoga practice is one such technique which has been found to be effective in mitigating stress, and enhancing an individual's overall health and well-being. Various researches have reported yoga as a body-mind exercise which enhances physical, mental, and spiritual relaxation by way of asanas (body postures of stretching), breathing and meditation. Yoga is a science which enables an individual to cope with stress and perform better in highly stressful situations. Stress-free individuals have been found to be happy and hence, perform better. Yoga is an ancient discipline which relaxes and purifies the body, the mind, and the spirit. It establishes a connection between the individual's body and soul.

Therefore, it can be concluded from the study that yoga is an effective tool for reducing and managing stress caused by various stressors like increasing demands at home and work, work-life balance, job insecurity, time pressure, increased competition for talent, need for continuous learning and skill improvement, managing relationships and family responsibilities etc. Yoga practice facilitates stress reduction and stress management, and results in the overall well-being of an individual with a wholesome personality.

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The logo for 'Pratibha Spandan' features the text 'Pratibha Spandan' in a purple, cursive font, centered within a large, multi-colored circular graphic. The graphic consists of several overlapping, curved lines in shades of orange, pink, green, and blue, creating a dynamic, swirling effect around the central text.

Pratibha
Spandan