



Yoga's Transformative Influence on Mental Well-being: A Post-Pandemic

Impact within the Teaching Fraternity

Author- Ms. DEEKSHA M R, Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, ST PAULS COLLEGE, Bengaluru (deeksha@stpaulscollege.edu.in)

Co- author - Dr. SHAILAJA M, Assistant Professor, Head of the Department of Humanities, ST PAULS COLLEGE, Bengaluru (shailaja.m@stpaulscollege.edu.in)

The contemporary era has witnessed a concerning decline in mental health, marked by a persistent downward trend. This escalating issue necessitates strategic interventions to address modern health concerns that contribute to severe illnesses, sometimes even resulting in fatality. The intricate interplay between physical and mental health has unveiled discernible gaps in daily routines, culminating in the transition from a state of wellness to one of illness. The teaching profession imposes significant demands on educators' physical and mental well-being. In the aftermath of the pandemic, educators are struggling with heightened stress levels made worse by the increased workloads. Despite the prevalent challenges posed by modern-day lifestyles, there exists a scarcity of effective interventions to alleviate chronic stressors. This study explores yoga's efficacy in mitigating the post-pandemic stress experienced by educators. The teaching fraternity confronts substantial mental and physical strain attributed to evolving a pressing need in recent years. Employing a theoretical synthesis approach augmented by an autoethnographic inquiry, the research seeks to synthesize theoretical perspectives. It aims at elucidating literature suggesting that integrating yoga into educators' routines may facilitate enhanced performance and holistic wellness, transcending the spectrum from illness to well-being.

Keywords: *Yoga, Mental Health, Union of Mind and Body, Psychological intervention, Holistic wellbeing*

Introduction

The term “health” is derived from the words ‘heal’ and ‘thy,’ which means to heal oneself. Health consists of the body and the mind. When these two aspects are unified, complete health can be achieved. The word “Yoga” is also derived from the term “Yuj,” which means the unification of the mind and the body. To understand oneself, there are two selves to consider: the ego self and the true or spiritual self. The ultimate goal of Yoga is to attain self-realization and a state of liberation called “Moksha”. (Basavaraddi, 2015)

According to WHO, health is “the state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being of an individual, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (WHO, 2023). The ultimate goal of health is to achieve a near-normal condition of wellness and well-being. This can be accomplished by managing both physical and mental health.

Yoga is a spiritual discipline that is more or less a science and art of living. The origin of Yoga dates back to historical civilizations. Shiva is known to be the first guru or the Adiyogi. It is known that Adiyogi shared the knowledge of Yoga with the *Saptharishis* in the Himalayas. They are known to have carried across the globe. The historical evidence dates back to the Vedic period, the period of sage Patanjali. The literature provides information about the yoga practices in various Upanishads, mahakathas, and religious teachings (Basavaraddi, 2015).

The challenges of today's teaching might involve physical and mental strain, leading to a decline in long-term health and social behavior. Managing the classroom disruptions leads them to have continuous sessions of burnout like psychosomatic complaints like body aches, and irritable bowel syndrome; illnesses like gastroenteritis, voice disruptions, HPA axis dysfunctions, and an increase in cortisol levels. (Daniel et.al, 2023)

Teaching is known to be a noble or helping profession. But, on the other hand, in the process of helping, theories exemplify a high rate of burnout due to the amount of emotional energy required when faced with emotional energy and overload. Without any delay, emotional exhaustion demands problem-focused coping (Shirom et al, 2005).

Pandemic's Impact on Education:

The outbreak of COVID-19, has vastly impacted the education system. It has led to a greater education crisis. Schools and Colleges have had closures for a long time affecting the physical and emotional connection between the teacher and the student. Prioritizing public health over anything else, the pandemic cost the individuals' health and well-being leading to an increased number of dropouts. (UNESCO, 2023)

Not only has the pandemic affected the students, but professional burnout was higher in the teachers due to greater workload and stress leading to increased psychophysical symptoms. (Rubilar, Oros, 2021). Teacher burnout contributed to increased COVID-19 anxiety, teaching anxiety, social anxiety, and anxiety related to administrative matters. (Pressley. 2021) Before the Pandemic, teachers' retention rate was 9%, but after the pandemic, there is an increase of up to 30%. (Learning Policy Institute, 2018). The findings of the research state that educators' well-being is essential to retain the teachers and foster the educator-child relationships that influence the child's learning. (Eadie et.al, 2021).

The objective of the Study:

1. To investigate the effectiveness of yoga interventions in improving the well-being and mental health of teachers within the education system.
2. To assess the impact of implementing yoga programs as a practical intervention for addressing stress, burnout, and other mental health challenges among educators.
3. To examine the potential benefits of yoga practices in enhancing teacher job satisfaction, resilience, and effectiveness in the classroom.
4. To advocate for policy changes and initiatives that prioritize mental health support for teachers, including integrating yoga programs into school wellness initiatives.
5. To contribute to the existing body of literature by providing empirical evidence on the effectiveness of yoga interventions for teachers, thereby addressing the research gap in this area.
6. To offer practical recommendations for implementing and sustaining yoga programs within educational settings, taking into account factors such as accessibility, inclusivity, and sustainability.

The rationale of the Study:

The rationale for conducting this study lies in the imperative need to address the well-being of teachers actively involved within the education system. As a professor of psychology, I am acutely aware of the stressors and challenges inherent in the teaching profession, often leading to burnout and mental health issues among educators. The absence of government policies targeting mental health in the teaching profession underscores the urgency to fill this gap through practical interventions. Additionally, there remains a dearth of empirical research on the effectiveness of yoga interventions for teachers in educational settings, highlighting the need for evidence-based approaches to support teacher well-being. By proposing the implementation of yoga as an intervention for teachers, this study aims to not only address the immediate well-being concerns but also advocate for policy changes that prioritize mental health support within the education system. Ultimately, this study seeks to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on teacher well-being and inform future research and practice in this critical area.

Understanding the Mental Health Challenges Faced by Teachers

Conducting classes during the Pandemic was one of the greatest challenges. Some challenges faced by the teachers are difficulty reaching out to students in remote areas, difficulty keeping the students motivated to learn and engage in the concepts, challenges in keeping track of students' progress, disturbance in internet connectivity, power cuts, lack of knowledge about the technical skills, requiring increased preparedness to teach concepts, and highly challenging to monitor the discipline of students as there is no scope for teachers to know the attention rate and interest of the students as compared to offline classes. (Gurung, 2021).

Teachers who experience more stressors repeatedly worsen their mental health and also find it hard to teach. People who could handle stress well would find it easier to cope and teach. (Baker et.al, 2021).

Theoretical Framework: Yoga, mental health and well-being

The yogic practices of today are not only effective to treat physical ailments, but also mental ailments. It helps an individual maintain, preserve, and promote a healthy lifestyle. Consistent

adaptation of yoga practices in daily life helps an individual to maintain a work-life balance. There are four branches of Yoga, namely Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Jnana Yoga, and Raja Yoga (Tiwari, 2016). Karma yoga is the path of work. It involves both action and its result. The path of work explains how an action that involves expectation and anticipation leads an individual to misery and unappeasable desires, therefore, helps break karma's bonds and forge new chains of work patterns. Bhakti Yoga is the path of devotion, a non-stop search for the lord, a search for extreme love for the god that brings eternal freedom (Bhatt. N, 2014). Bhakti is an emotional state of binding our emotions in a yogic language. When the emotions are bound to limits, it can reduce psychotic and neurotic symptoms leading to reduced levels of depression, stress, and anxiety (Maurya. K, et.al, 2018). Jnana Yoga is the path of knowledge, the unity of the Brahman and the Atman. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy offers a solution to problems by reconciling to know thyself, i.e., the nature of self-understanding. Rational Emotive Behavioural Therapy offers balancing the emotional state of an individual. Both of these psychotherapeutic approaches can be achieved through the practice of '*Neti Neti*', an analytical meditation to understand the self and the non-self (O'Donnell, 2018). Raja Yoga is the royal path of meditation. It is one of the eight-fold of the Patanjali's Yoga Sutras. This path enables an individual to gain control and mastery over the mind and negate worldly pleasures. *Sudarshana Kriya* is a combination of different types of yoga involving breath control mechanisms that have a therapeutic effect. Kundalini yoga uses the *Chakras* to stimulate psychic energy, helping in controlled breathing, and body movements and improving core psychological capacities (Sharma, et.al, 2017).

Empirical Evidence of Yoga's Impact on Teacher Well-being

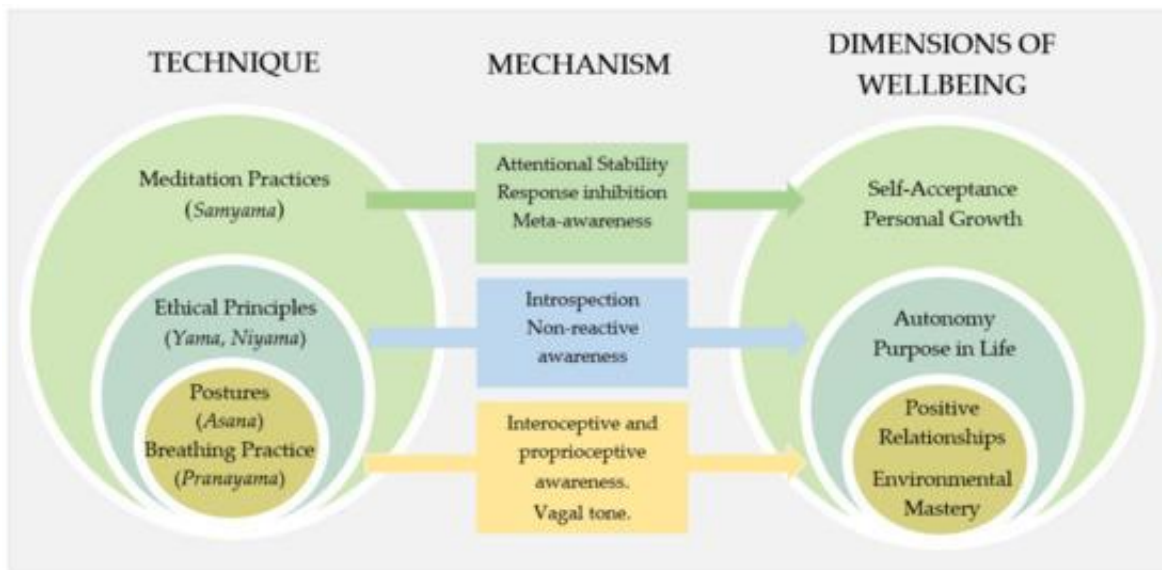
Koner et.al, (2022) conducted a study on "Yoga as a Mindfulness Practice on Music Educators' Stress during the COVID-19 Pandemic". The findings of the study conclude that yoga as a mindful practice has positive effects on an individual in improving the mode, reducing stress levels, increasing relaxation and patterns of breathing, and as a result, greater focus while teaching. The participants of the study also indicated that incorporating Yoga and mindfulness practices in their teaching routine helped them to focus better on managing their stress levels.

Joshi et.al (2020) conducted a study on “Impact of coronavirus pandemic on the Indian education sector: perspectives of teachers on online teaching and assessments.” The findings reveal that there are four barriers that teachers face during online teaching. They lack basic facilities in the home setting, interruptions from family members during classes, negative attitudes, lack of motivation, and security concerns with the professional data.

Hepburn, McMahon (2017) conducted a study on “Pranayama meditation (yoga breathing) for stress relief: Is it beneficial for teachers?” The study made use of Perceived stress The findings of the study indicated that participants experienced a decrease in their perceived level of stress. Participants reported benefits in both their professional and personal lives.

Practical Applications: Implementing Yoga Programs for Teachers

Teachers’ stress can have alarming physical and psychological impacts on their professional life.



Complementary Interventions Model given by Hepburn and Carol (2021).

The Complementary Interventions (CIs) model speaks about the techniques of Samyama, Yama, Niyama, Asana and Pranayama. The model explains how various techniques of practicing yoga can benefit the aspects of eudaimonic well being. By meditating, it leads to attentional stability, response inhibition and meta awareness. When these characteristics are a part of the individual, there shall be an increase in self acceptance and personal growth. Ethical principles of Yama and Niyama can suggest introspection and non-reactive awareness, therefore an increase in Autonomy and Purpose in life. Practice asanas can benefit the levels of interoceptive and proprioceptive awareness and vagal tone of an individual. It fosters positive relationships and Environmental mastery (Hepburn and Carol, 2021).

The yoga based Intervention provides an opportunity for teachers to build up these capacities. Therefore, it is inferred that the yoga based intervention can help increase levels of self-efficacy of teachers, sharing about life, seminars, tour, group activities, group discussions and sports should be regularly arranged.

When considering the practical aspects of designing and implementing yoga programs within educational settings, it's important to address key considerations to ensure accessibility, feasibility, and cultural sensitivity.

Accessibility:

- Offer a variety of class times and formats to accommodate teachers' schedules and preferences, including before or after school, during planning periods, or as part of professional development days.
- Provide options for both in-person and virtual yoga sessions to accommodate teachers who may have different comfort levels or logistical constraints.
- Ensure that yoga spaces are accessible to all teachers, including those with physical disabilities, by providing accommodations such as ramps, accessible seating, and modified poses.
- Offer modifications and adaptations for yoga poses to accommodate diverse abilities, body types, and fitness levels among participants.

Feasibility:

- Collaborate with experienced yoga instructors or certified yoga teachers who have expertise in working with adult learners and understand the specific needs and challenges faced by teachers.
- Consider the availability of resources and funding for implementing yoga programs, including the costs associated with hiring instructors, purchasing equipment, and maintaining yoga spaces.
- Start with pilot programs or small-scale initiatives to assess feasibility and gather feedback from participants before scaling up to larger programs.
- Integrate yoga into existing professional development structures and schedules to maximize participation and minimize disruption to teachers' work responsibilities.

Cultural Sensitivity:

- Acknowledge and respect the diverse cultural backgrounds and beliefs of teachers by offering yoga practices that are inclusive and culturally sensitive.
- Avoid appropriating or misrepresenting cultural elements of yoga and instead focus on the universal principles of mindfulness, relaxation, and self-care.
- Provide opportunities for teachers to share their own cultural practices and perspectives related to well-being and stress management, creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment.
- Incorporate diverse music, language, and imagery into yoga sessions to reflect the cultural diversity of participants and promote a sense of belonging and acceptance.

By addressing these practical considerations, educational institutions can create inclusive and sustainable yoga programs that effectively support teacher well-being and promote a culture of holistic health and self-care within the teaching fraternity.

Challenges and Considerations

Some of the strategies for overcoming challenges with regard to cultural sensitivity and promoting inclusivity and accessibility:

1. Skepticism:

- Challenge: Some teachers may be skeptical about the effectiveness or relevance of yoga practices for their well-being or professional development.

- Strategy: Provide evidence-based information and testimonials from educators who have benefited from yoga programs. Offer introductory sessions or workshops to allow skeptical teachers to experience the benefits firsthand.

- Promoting Inclusivity: Create a supportive and non-judgmental environment where teachers feel comfortable exploring and expressing their doubts or concerns about yoga.

2. Resource Constraints:

- Challenge: Limited financial resources or access to qualified yoga instructors may pose barriers to implementing yoga programs.

- Strategy: Seek partnerships with local yoga studios, community organizations, or certified instructors who may be willing to offer pro bono or discounted services. Explore grant funding opportunities or crowdfunding campaigns to support program expenses.

- Promoting Inclusivity: Offer free or subsidized yoga sessions, provide scholarships or financial assistance for teachers with limited means, and ensure that yoga programs are accessible to all regardless of socioeconomic status.

3. Cultural Factors:

- Challenge: Cultural differences and beliefs about yoga may influence participation and acceptance among teachers from diverse backgrounds.

- Strategy: Offer culturally sensitive and inclusive yoga practices that respect and incorporate diverse cultural perspectives. Provide opportunities for teachers to share their own cultural practices related to well-being and stress management.

- Promoting Inclusivity: Create a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere where teachers from different cultural backgrounds feel valued and respected. Incorporate diverse music, language, and imagery into yoga sessions to reflect cultural diversity and promote a sense of belonging.

4. Accessibility:

- Challenge: Physical limitations, transportation barriers, or scheduling conflicts may hinder teachers' ability to participate in yoga programs.

- Strategy: Offer a variety of class times and formats to accommodate diverse schedules and preferences. Provide virtual or remote options for teachers who are unable to attend in-person sessions. Ensure that yoga spaces are accessible to all, with accommodations for physical disabilities if needed.

- Promoting Inclusivity: Proactively reach out to teachers who may face accessibility barriers and offer personalized support or accommodations to ensure their participation.

By addressing these challenges and implementing strategies to promote inclusivity and accessibility, educational institutions can create more equitable and sustainable yoga programs that effectively support teacher well-being and foster a culture of holistic health within the teaching fraternity.

Policy Implications and Recommendations

UGC offers ‘The Scheme for Promotion of Yoga Education and Practice and Positive health in Universities.’ The major aim of the scheme is to make sure that there is a Yoga centre in recognized universities to improve the health of students and teachers. No policies have been visible from the government that advocates positive mental health among the teaching fraternity outside UGC. There is a high need to focus on the mental health of educators as they are the backbone of any educational institute. Without quality teachers, no student can be benefitted from the same. (UGC, 2007)

Conclusion

We’ve seen how yoga can really help teachers feel better mentally, especially after the challenges of the pandemic. By looking at the problems teachers face, how yoga works, and real-life examples, we’ve learned that yoga can make a big difference. It can help teachers feel less stressed and more satisfied with their work. Plus, it's not hard to start—schools just need to make it accessible and include everyone. If we want our teachers to be happy and healthy, it’s important to make yoga part of their training and support. By doing this, we can create a better environment for teachers, students, and everyone involved in education.

References:

Basavaraddi, Dr. (2015). Yoga: its origin, history and development. *Redwityoga*. http://www.redtwigyoga.com/uploads/1/2/1/9/12195443/yoga_its_origin_history_and_development.pdf



Bhakti Yoga. (Byrant, E). Google Books. <https://books.google.co.in/books?id=2c-DQAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover#v=twopage&q&f=false>

Eadie, P., Levickis, P., Murray, L., Page, J., Elek, C., & Church, A. (2021). Early Childhood Educators' Wellbeing During the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Early childhood education journal*, 49(5), 903–913. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-021-01203-3>

Hepburn, S., Carroll, A., & McCuaig, L. (2021). Exploring a Complementary Stress management and Wellbeing intervention model for teachers: Participant Experience. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(17), 9009. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18179009>

Hepburn, S.-J., & McMahon, M. (2017, January 1). *Pranayama Meditation (Yoga breathing) for stress relief: Is it beneficial for teachers?* Informit. <https://search.informit.org/doi/abs/10.3316/ielapa.088983828764626>

Gurung, Dr. (2021). CHALLENGES FACED BY TEACHERS IN ONLINE TEACHING DURING COVID19 PANDEMIC. *The Online Journal of Distance Education and e-Learning*, 9(1), <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2734-2268>. <https://tojdell.net/journals/tojdel/articles/v09i01/v09i01-02.pdf>

Joshi, A., Vinay, M., & Bhaskar, P. (2020). Impact of coronavirus pandemic on the Indian education sector: perspectives of teachers on online teaching and assessments. *Interactive Technology and Smart Education*, 18(2), 205–226. <https://doi.org/10.1108/itse-06-2020-0087>

Koner, K., Potter-Gee, J., & Borden, B. (2022). Yoga as a mindfulness practice on music educators' stress during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Update: Applications of Research in Music Education*, 42(1), 22–32. <https://doi.org/10.1177/87551233221111980>

Madigan, D. J., Kim, L., Glandorf, H. L., & Kavanagh, O. (2023). Teacher burnout and physical health: A systematic review. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 119, 102173. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2023.102173>

Maurya, K., Mishra, G. P., & Gowda, P. (2018). A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF BHAKTI YOGA PRACTICES USED TO REDUCE ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION LEVELS IN PATIENTS. *International Journal of Research and Analytical Reviews*, 5(4), E-ISSN 2348-1269, P-ISSN 2349-5138. <https://ijrar.org/papers/IJRAR1944280.pdf>

Pressley, T. (2021). Factors contributing to teacher burnout during COVID-19. *Educational Researcher*, 50(5), 325–327. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189x211004138>



Rubilar, N. V., & Oros, L. B. (2021). Stress and burnout in teachers during times of pandemic. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.756007>

Sharma, T., Kumari, P., & Kumar, V. (2017). Yoga and Mental Health: a review. *Journal of the Indian Academy of Applied Psychology*, 43(1), 128–133.

https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Akhilendra-Singh-3/publication/318093064_Trait_emotional_intelligence_work-family_culture_and_organizational_citizenship_behavior_among_Indian_managers/links/59652044aca27227d78c5ca7/Trait-emotional-intelligence-work-family-culture-and-organizational-citizenship-behavior-among-Indian-managers.pdf#page=128

[3/publication/318093064_Trait_emotional_intelligence_work-](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Akhilendra-Singh-3/publication/318093064_Trait_emotional_intelligence_work-family_culture_and_organizational_citizenship_behavior_among_Indian_managers/links/59652044aca27227d78c5ca7/Trait-emotional-intelligence-work-family-culture-and-organizational-citizenship-behavior-among-Indian-managers.pdf#page=128)

[family_culture_and_organizational_citizenship_behavior_among_Indian_managers/links/596](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Akhilendra-Singh-3/publication/318093064_Trait_emotional_intelligence_work-family_culture_and_organizational_citizenship_behavior_among_Indian_managers/links/59652044aca27227d78c5ca7/Trait-emotional-intelligence-work-family-culture-and-organizational-citizenship-behavior-among-Indian-managers.pdf#page=128)

[52044aca27227d78c5ca7/Trait-emotional-intelligence-work-family-culture-and-](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Akhilendra-Singh-3/publication/318093064_Trait_emotional_intelligence_work-family_culture_and_organizational_citizenship_behavior_among_Indian_managers/links/59652044aca27227d78c5ca7/Trait-emotional-intelligence-work-family-culture-and-organizational-citizenship-behavior-among-Indian-managers.pdf#page=128)

[organizational-citizenship-behavior-among-Indian-managers.pdf#page=128](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Akhilendra-Singh-3/publication/318093064_Trait_emotional_intelligence_work-family_culture_and_organizational_citizenship_behavior_among_Indian_managers/links/59652044aca27227d78c5ca7/Trait-emotional-intelligence-work-family-culture-and-organizational-citizenship-behavior-among-Indian-managers.pdf#page=128)

Shirom, A., Melamed, S., & Toker, S. (2005). BURNOUT AND HEALTH REVIEW: CURRENT KNOWLEDGE AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS. *INTERNATIONAL REVIEW OF INDUSTRIAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY*, 20, 0-470-86710–8.

Understanding teacher shortages: 2018 update. (2018, August 24). Learning Policy Institute.

<https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/understanding-teacher-shortages-interactive>

Yoga, H. (2021, May 14). *What is Neti Neti?* Hridaya Yoga. <https://hridaya-yoga.com/blog/what-is-neti-neti/>