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Mental health and Yoga among elderly

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Abstract

Old age is a priceless stage of life filled with a variety of experiences in the progression of human existence, and every citizen must understand its significance. Elders play a vital role in the family and society. Life is a continuous process of overcoming difficulties or making adjustments. Depression, anxiety, and sleeplessness are among the most prevalent mental health issues among the elderly. Yoga was developed and first practised in India thousands of years ago. It is a way of life or an integrated system for the body, mind, and inner soul. The current study was carried out to assess yoga's impact on elderly's mental health. The investigation is being conducted using a phenomenological research method. According to results, practising yoga frequently helps to promote happiness and reduce difficulties with both physical and mental health. It is recommended that Yoga should be considered as the most important, effective tools available for human being to overcome various physical and psychological problems.

Keywords: Yoga, elderly, mental health

Introduction

In the Indian socio-cultural landscape, the elderly hold a position of reverence and authority, traditionally seen as carriers of wisdom, moral values, and cultural continuity (Raveesh, 2024; Saha *et al.*, 2022) ^[25, 26]. Their role extends beyond familial boundaries, shaping community norms and preserving civilizational ethos through active participation in rituals, storytelling, and intergenerational transmission of knowledge (Bandyopadhyay & Singh, 2023) ^[1]. Old age in India has historically been viewed as a spiritually significant phase, aligned with the concept of *vanaprastha* a stage dedicated to reflection, renunciation, and mentoring the younger generation (Giridhar *et al.*, 2017) ^[11]. However, with the ongoing socio-economic transformations, including urbanization, migration, and the decline of the joint family system, the traditional status of elders is increasingly under threat. Despite these changes, studies underscore the continued importance of older adults in contributing to familial decision-making, childcare, conflict resolution, and cultural preservation (Khurana & Sethi, 2025) ^[18]. To truly honor the role of older adults in modern India, it is essential to revive cultural respect for ageing while simultaneously implementing policies that enable elders to lead active, dignified lives. Ageing should not be seen merely as a phase of loss but as a period enriched with possibilities for wisdom-sharing, self-reflection, and meaningful contributions to family and society (Visaria & Dommaraju, 2019) ^[31].

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), the 60 million elderly citizens in India are anticipated to grow to more than 227 million by 2050, an increase of more than 280 percent from the current year. This move will place further burden on society and the country's economy since a significant section of the population will be faced with geriatric concerns as a result (Siriwardhana *et al.*, 2018) ^[30].

Prior to globalisation, urbanisation, industrialisation, etc., this class served as a bridge to connect the past and present. However, as a result of these developments, new value patterns have emerged, which have a negative impact on the quality of life for the elderly (Giridhar *et al.*, 2017) ^[11] and increase the risk of mental health problems.

Human growth, both physical and mental occurs continuously from conception until death, following a natural sequence (Santrock, 2021) ^[27]. Life is generally divided into six stages: infancy, childhood, adolescence, youth, adulthood, and old age (Bee & Boyd, 2019) ^[2]. From conception through adolescence, individuals experience a rapid phase of development and formation (Papalia & Martorell, 2021) ^[24]. Old age represents the final stage of life, often

marked by a gradual decline in physical abilities, mental functioning, and social engagement (Giridhar *et al.*, 2017) ^[11].

Which age should be considered as the basis of recognition of old age, it depends to some extent on the quality of life and the state of health. By the way, in many countries a person above the age of 65 is called old. As far as India is concerned, we can keep in mind that at what age the government sets the retirement age. That is on completing which age, considering the employee not useful for service physically and mentally, retires him and pays pension to him for his past services. From this point of view, we see that earlier this age was 55 years. Later it was increased and it became 58 years. Presently this age is 60 years. Therefore, at present it can be considered as a reliable basis for the identification of old age. The United Nations also believes that progress beyond the age of 60 years is a hallmark of population aging or progress towards old age. So here by old we mean the person who has crossed the age of 60 years. From this point of view, persons up to the age of sixty years can be identified as new generation and persons above that age can be identified as old generation.

Life expectancy was about 32 years at the time of independence in 1947. As a result of advancements in public health and medical care, various infectious illnesses have been effectively controlled, which has resulted in considerable drops in death rates (Life expectancy at birth-India). Over the past few decades, there has been a significant increase in human life expectancy. In India, men and women are expected to live an average of 67 and 72 years, respectively. However, individuals may live longer lives than these figures suggest, nevertheless, males may expect to live for 75 to 80 years, while the majority of women reach their 80s. A human life span is considered to be 100 years in Indian traditional culture.

Unfortunately, many older people do not experience old age as a period of enjoyment, leisure, and satisfaction. According to recent studies, anxiety, depression, and cognitive impairments are the most prevalent mental diseases among the elderly, accounting for 20% of all cases with a greater incidence of 21.9% in India (Khan *et al.*, 2022) ^[17]

Problems of ageing: Age-related issues include loss of social, mental, and physical status as well as changes to one's function and obligations within the family and community, which can lead to a person being dependent on others.

Old age is characterized by the following conditions

Physical health problems

- Decrease in strength and power of resistance. Possibility of suffering serious injuries and infirmities, which take longer to recover from than during youth.
- Inadequate working of muscular system puts strain on supporting tissues of the body as well as tendons, ligaments and joints.
- Increase the risk of circulatory and cardiac diseases.
- Rheumatism, sleeplessness, constipation, coughing, breathing difficulties, bronchitis, prostate enlargement, high blood pressure, diabetes, and paralysis are common problems.

Mental health problems: depression, loneliness, anxiety, suspicion, self-centeredness due to wear and tear of the brain tissues. In addition, there are several mental health issues that older person's experience, including arthritis, sleep issues, and stroke.

Yoga: Yoga is a way of life that focuses on physical and mental well-being, both of which are crucial in today's world. Yoga has a significant role to play in addressing both physical and emotional issues in today's dissatisfying world (Mooventhan & Nivethitha 2017) ^[21]. A man may only be considered healthy if he is in good bodily, mental, spiritual, intellectual, and social health.

Yoga can be defined as "a comprehensive, ancient Indian philosophy of daily living, which involves multiple branches including morality, spirituality, and physical health" (Michaelson, 2005, p. 5) ^[20].

The therapeutic benefits of Yoga have long been accepted in Indian culture and are understood according to various ancient Indian physiological, psychological, and spiritual systems (Chobe *et al.*, 2020) ^[6] Sri Sri Ravi Shankar (spiritual guru) emphasized that yoga is a spiritual integration, something that is beyond our comprehension. The religion has nothing to do with yoga. This is the science of life that help us to live accordingly.

It is one of the most effective non-drug therapeutic methods (Forlyow, 2011) ^[9] and it can be used as a complimentary treatment (Shapiro *et al.*, 2007) ^[29]. It offers a distinctive view of wellbeing that many have articulated and understood scientifically. According to Gangadhar (2023) ^[10] in order to improve physical and emotional health, yoga may become a lifetime choice.

The elderly is more prone to mental health problems. Jha *et al.* (2023) ^[16] conducted a stratified assessment for geriatric mental health in different states reported that people in this demographic might significantly suffer from mental health issues that affect their everyday lifestyle, ability to function, and general well-being (Hornby-Turner *et al.*, 2017) ^[15]. There will likely be a significant public health concern in India as a result of the growth in the proportion of elderly people and the increased prevalence of mental health issues among older people. The prevalence of mental health illness in senior citizen in India needs to be reduced (Grover & Malhotra, 2015) ^[13]. Yoga can play an important role in reducing these types of problems, according to Bhatt 2004 yoga can be done by people of any age and physical condition Previous studies also reported the positive effects of yoga on older people's cognitive issues. Chobe *et al.* (2020) ^[6] conducted a systematic review on impact of yoga on mental health among elderly and concluded that yoga-based interventions have positive impact on improvement of mental health condition of elders. But little research has been done on how yoga is perceived by older individuals. This study investigated the viewpoint of the elderly on the applicability of yoga practise, its impact on daily life, and its ability to avoid mental health issues.

Methodology

- **Research design and method:** Phenomenological approach is used to conduct this study. In this both interviewing and careful observation are employed to gather information. Interviewing the respondents served as a methodical way to get the data. The information gleaned from the interview wasn't enough on its own.

For precise information of the economic, social, political, and attitudes of various families as well as their social surroundings, it therefore appears suitable to use the observational approach.

- **Participants:** 30 male and female, age ranged 60-75 years from various socio-economic background were selected for the study,
- **Procedure:** Elderly's Morning Yoga group and evening walker groups of Aligarh region was approached purposefully and requested to participate in the current study. They were interviewed individually as well as in group. They were asked about the personal experience about their problems and role of yoga in their lives.

Result and discussion

- The following topic presents the data of how yoga is perceived and how it affects physical, mental, and other benefits. Quotes from the participants used as examples for the conclusions. The majority of participants believed that yoga exercise was beneficial. The majority of participants emphasised the value of yoga in leading a healthier lifestyle and said they had learnt a lot about the advantages of practising yoga.
- **Yoga and physical fitness:** The decline in physical health among older adults is a persistent trend, resulting in physical weakness, disease, and functional disability that can cause mental health problems and increase the risk of suicide. Most of the participants said that *"Yoga improves the body's immunity, breathing, power to live, and ability to sustain a healthy lifestyle. Thus, as a result of yoga's numerous advantages, the entire globe is embracing it completely today.* Previous studies also reported the positive benefits of yoga on physical fitness of elderly people (Sengupta, 2012., Welford et al., 2022) [28, 32]

One of participants who is a retired worker emphasized that *"At this time, our civilization or we can say that our culture is changing more quickly. The way that people live, think, work, eat, and consume other things is changing quickly. Human life has become more pleasant, but at the same time, physical illnesses and mental stress are on the rise. Particularly in case of elderly they just want to sit comfortably because they think that they had enough worked previously that is why they do not want to engage in any physical activity and are prone to more mental and physical problems. Therefore, relaxing exercises of yoga are beneficial to maintain they physical fitness"*.

Apart from this one of the female participants told that *"the problem of back and waist pain is also very common in the elderly, with the help of various yogasanas, these pains can also be helped in keeping away, that is why yoga is very necessary"*. In 2017, Moveenthan and Nivethetha did a systematic review to examine the influence of yoga practise on a variety of older health issues. Based on the data they had access to; they came to the conclusion that yoga is effective in addressing a number of these issues.

Yoga and mental health: Elders will need to work together as best they can in light of the changing circumstances, on the one hand, while accepting their responsibilities, in order for the working youth and the experienced elders to reinvent society by introducing a new one so that their mental health

could remain stable. In the mid-70 one of the participants talked about the importance of yoga that *"it is not that we are getting younger but it helps in accommodating with aging process"*

"I had trouble falling asleep, despite my best efforts. Every time, I felt exhausted. Following my yoga practise, this has been the largest transformation in my life, female interviewee participant. Hariprasad et al. (2013) [14] also conducted an interventional study to find out the effect of yoga interventions on sleep and quality of life on elderly, they reported that yoga has positive impact on sleep among elderly.

A male participant said that *earlier I was more aggressive, despite knowing that I cannot completely control my anger, I have learnt to manage it. I credit my frequent practise of yoga for this change"*. Bonura and Tenebaum (2014) [15] reported that yoga helps in anger management

"I am overjoyed to be a part of this morning yoga group, and it is true that after I have participated, I feel extremely energised and experienced an improvement in concentration, and I feel that everyone should join yoga programmes." A female participant.

Yoga and change in life style: The majority of participants emphasised the value of yoga in leading a better life and said they had learnt a lot about the advantages of yoga and mild exercise. They believed that maintaining a physically active lifestyle into old age was essential. All elderly people at this stage of life are more emotionally, financially, physically, and psychologically reliant on their friends, neighbours, and family members. For older people, maintaining close ties to their surroundings is particularly crucial (Bhavanani & Ramanathan, 2015) [14]. Senior citizens may benefit from yoga classes since they interact with one another frequently and feel good in groups. One of the participants commented, *"I eagerly await this phase of my life every day because here we can make friends and share both our joy and sorrow."*

Yoga and happiness: Happiness is not synonymous with wealth, privileges, or constant joy. It is a condition in which individuals feel content with life and understand its purpose. When they were interviewed about the role of yoga in happiness then it has been found that many of elderly have observed that *"they feel more energetic, cheerful, and joyous after a morning session of yoga.* Deshpande and Verma (2013) [8] reported that yoga may also boost happiness through the power of positive thought. Other studies also reported that older adults with higher levels of happiness have a greater probability of good health (Noormohammadi et al., 2017) [23]

While discussing various benefits of yoga there are some elderlies who reported many apprehensions regarding the yoga practices on the basis of interview conducted on a yoga expert, he has given some advises on the general questions. *Have I been practising yoga properly?* One of the most frequently question in their mind is that they practicing yoga properly or not.

Expert views are that you are the best person to evaluate this. Look at your smile. Simply practice yourself as much as you can while enjoying. The greatest way to tell if you are doing it correctly or not is based on that. Your mind and spirit will be renewed through yoga. strengthens your body.

maintains the equilibrium of your hormonal system and internal organs. Take it easy and feel it.

Are there any simple yoga poses for seniors who are new to the practice? Some participants thought yoga wasn't aerobic enough, wouldn't test their muscles or circulation, and wouldn't make them sweat. They believed that yoga focused on a greater level of flexibility that wasn't truly important for daily living. Expert said that elderly people should focus on light yoga asanas because their body is fragile and can not be exerted

What precautions should seniors take?

- Wear clean and loose clothes.
- Always do yoga in the open atmosphere/good ventilated place.
- Do yoga very slowly and as per instructions.
- Always do yoga regularly.
- Always have a meal on time. Meal should be as simple as possible
- Increase intakes of liquids.
- Don't have anything before and after half an hour doing yoga.
- Always use a mat for sitting

Conclusion

The population of senior citizens in India, which has the largest population in the world, has nearly quadrupled in recent decades (Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India). The issues that come with being older are all interconnected. Elderly people become helpless and powerless in their later years of life for a variety of reasons, including social, economic, psychological, adjustment-related, health-related, and other issues. The issue of this time of life can be lessened by having good physical and mental health, financial independence, and peace. India has been a centre for yoga practise for millennia. But yoga is now more significant than ever before. Yoga may help someone gain mastery over their body and mind. Yoga refers to the union of the body and mind. Yoga promotes balance between the body and the psyche. Yoga therefore has a significant part to play in the current environment. Yoga improves immunity, respiration, life force, and aids in upholding a healthy lifestyle. In this way, as a result of yoga's numerous advantages, the entire globe is embracing it completely today.

Suggestion

- Elderly people should be included in the decision making of the family so that they feel their importance.
- Full care should be provided so that they remain mentally, physically and emotionally healthy.
- Elderly should encourage for yoga regularly.
- Old people should get full facilities of recreation, so that they can remain healthy.
- Older people should be guaranteed full respect and security so that they can avoid mental and physical abuse.
- Financial independence is very important for old people, it is necessary to have enough money so that the feeling of insecurity ends in them and they can spend according to their needs.

- The elders must give up their traditional dogma, efforts should be made to keep a good rapport with the youth of the new generation.

Limitation of the study: several limitations to the study are noted including the small sample sizes and the lack of consistency in the types of yoga practices evaluated. Sampling was purposeful so it can be a limitation. Further systematic experimental researches are required.

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