

Impact of Yoga Nidra Meditation on Perceived Stress and Self Regulation in Teacher Trainees

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ABSTRACT

The present study investigates the practice of yoga nidra meditation as an effective strategy for addressing the perceived stress and self regulation of teacher trainees. In this study, purposive sampling was used and the sample was drawn from two Colleges of Education in Chengalpet and Chennai. The sample consisted of 70 women students of whom 35 were in the experimental group and 35 in the control group. The age range was between 21 years to 23 years. The mean age of the experimental group was 21.83 years (SD = 0.86). The mean age of the control group was 21.89 years (SD = 0.83). The yoga nidra intervention module, which consisted of 20 sessions, was administered to the experimental group. There were three sessions per week with each session lasting for 1 hour and 30 minutes. Psychological tests were used to measure perceived stress and self-regulation. These tests were administered before and after the intervention to both the groups. The results showed that Yoga nidra meditation significantly decreased perceived stress in teacher trainees who underwent the intervention compared to a control group.

Keywords: *Yoga Nidra, self regulation, perceived stress, teacher trainees*

Teaching jobs are really more stressful than those of people in other professions. According to Johnson et al (2006), teaching is one of the most stressful occupations of the 26 professions he studied. Many teacher trainee students undergoing the Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) Degree program experience their first year in the training as stressful. Solving their psychological problem during their initial stage of training is much better than counselling them after they become teachers. B.Ed students may underestimate the amount of time it takes to complete reading and writing assignments, to print out copies of their work, or to travel to the schools. Missing deadlines, regardless of the reason, is stressful, especially because missing work leads to falling behind. Even well-prepared students experience stress, especially if they spend a lot of time on assignments but do not receive the grade they expect.

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Received: August 13, 2018; Revision Received: August 3, 2018; Accepted: September 1, 2018

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One possible approach to helping them is through contemplative practices such as meditation (Miller, 1994). The reason for using meditation is that it can be a form of self-learning. Another reason for engaging in contemplation is that it allows students to deal with the stresses in their lives. Research indicates that meditation is an effective tool in enhancing physical and mental well being. Finally, meditation is important to how we approach teaching. If teaching is ego-based it can become a frustrating series of mini-battles with students (Benson, 1976; Walsh, 1983).

Meditation

Meditation is a practice where an individual trains the mind or induces a mode of consciousness, either to realize some benefit or for the mind to simply acknowledge its content without becoming identified with that content, or as an end in itself. The term *meditation* refers to a broad variety of practices that includes techniques designed to promote relaxation, build internal energy or life force (qi, ki, prana, etc.) and develop compassion, love, patience, generosity and forgiveness. A particularly ambitious form of meditation aims at effortlessly sustained single-pointed concentration meant to enable its practitioner to enjoy an indestructible sense of well-being while engaging in any life activity.

As early as 1971, Naranjo noted that "The word '*meditation*' has been used to designate a variety of practices that differ enough from one another so that we may find trouble in defining what meditation is". There is no definition of necessary and sufficient criteria for meditation that has achieved universal or widespread acceptance within the modern scientific community. In popular usage, the word "meditation" and the phrase "meditative practice" are often used imprecisely to designate broadly similar practices, or sets of practices, that are found across many cultures and traditions.

Yoga nidra or "yogic sleep" is a state of consciousness between waking and sleeping, like the "going-to-sleep" stage. It is a state in which the body is completely relaxed, and the practitioner becomes systematically and increasingly aware of the inner world by following a set of (audio) instructions. The yogic goal of paths, deep relaxation (yoga nidra) and meditation are the same, a state called samadhi. Yoga nidra is the deepest possible states of relaxation while still maintaining full consciousness. In lucid dreaming, one is only (or mainly) cognizant of the dream environment, and has little or no awareness of one's actual environment. The practice of yoga relaxation has been found to reduce tension, stress and regulating the self. Yoga nidra refers to the conscious awareness of the deep sleep state, referred to as prajna in Mandukya Upanishad. (Swami Satyananda Saraswati, 2013)

Perceived stress

Perceived stress refers to the feelings or thoughts that an individual has about how much stress they perceive under at a given point in time or over a given time period. Perceived stress incorporates feelings about the uncontrollability and unpredictability of one's life, how often one has to deal with irritating hassles, how much change is occurring in one's life and confidence in one's ability to deal with problems or difficulties. It is not measuring the types

or frequencies of stressful events which have happened to a person, but rather how an individual feels about the general stressfulness of their life and their ability to handle such stress. Individuals may suffer similar negative life events but appraise the impact or severity of these two different extents as a result of factors such as personality, coping resources, and support. (Patel, 1991)

Self regulation

Self-regulation is the ability to monitor and control our own behaviour, emotions, or thoughts, altering them in accordance with the demands of the situation. It includes the abilities to inhibit first responses, to resist interference from irrelevant stimulation, and to persist on relevant tasks even when we do not enjoy them. Meditation has been considered as one of the strategies that bring about self-regulation.

"Meditation refers to a family of self-regulation practices that focus on training attention and awareness in order to bring mental processes under greater voluntary control and thereby foster general mental well-being and development and/or specific capacities such as calm, clarity, and concentration" -Walsh and Shapiro (2006).

Teacher trainee

Teachers are expected to be mentally healthy but the problems of teachers are more than what it was in the past. A major source of problem of teachers is result of failure of school to meet the social needs and jobs demands of the teachers. School teachers face high amounts of stress during teaching and handling students. Classroom in developing countries remain overcrowded and teachers face intensive verbal communications, prolonged standing and high volume of work load (Schuck, 2012). With proper practice of meditation, school teachers can create the right kind of chemistry, where they are naturally peaceful, joyous and loving within themselves. The inner science of Yoga/meditation helps liberate teachers from their problems and stresses, both physically and psychologically. (Sharpe, 2010).

According to Jha and Baime (2007), regular meditation calms down the restlessness of the mind, and decreases the number of distracting thoughts, bringing a sense of inner peace and relaxation. These researchers found that as the sense of inner peace increases, the ability to concentrate and focus the mind improves.

Purpose of research

The purpose of this study was to investigate if meditation (specifically yoga nidra meditation) is an effective strategy for addressing stress and self regulation of student teachers. The research question was: Does training in yoga nidra meditation increase self-regulation and decrease perceived stress in teacher trainees?

METHODOLOGY

The study used a quasi experimental design. The independent variable was yoga nidra meditation intervention and the dependent variables were perceived stress and self-regulation.

Sample

Purposive sampling was used and the sample was drawn from two Colleges of Education in Chengalpet and Chennai based on the inclusion criteria.

Inclusion criteria

1. Students who had given consent to be part of the research study for one-month periods have been included.
2. Students who had completed under graduation were included.
3. Students in the age group of 21 years and 23 years were included.
4. Those students who had basic knowledge of English were included.

Sample characteristic

The experimental and control groups each consisted of 35 women students. Their ages ranged from 21 years to 23 years. The mean age of the experimental group was 21.83 years ($SD = 0.86$). The mean age of the control group was 21.89 years ($SD = 0.83$). All students had completed graduation. The socioeconomic status of the family was mostly middle class.

Measures

The following psychological tests were used:

1. Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen, 1988)
2. The Self-Regulation Questionnaire (SRQ; Brown, Miller, & Lawendowski, 1999)

Yoga Nidra Intervention Module

Yoga nidra is a technique developed by Bihar School of Yoga. The investigator received training in the theory and practices of yoga nidra and was also trained to administer and teach it to others. The yoga nidra intervention module was developed and consisted of 20 sessions. There were three sessions per week each session lasting for 1 hour and 30 minutes.

Procedure

After the sample was selected, informed consent was obtained from the participants. The investigator conducted the pre-assessment (2 psychological tests) for both the experimental and control groups before implementation of the intervention. The meditation sessions were held in the afternoon an hour after the participants had lunch. The instructions for the meditation were given by the investigator and she was assisted by a faculty of the college. Yoga nidra training and practice was given for 1 hour 30 min on alternate days for 20 days in the months of February and March 2016.

Two weeks following the implementation of the meditation programme, post assessment was carried out using the two tests.

RESULTS

Data was analysed using SPSS Version 20. Independent t test was carried out to establish pre-intervention equivalence of means between the experimental and the control groups on

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the dependent variables and to test the significance of the difference between the means at post Intervention. As seen in Table 1, the experimental and control groups were equivalent on the dependent variables - perceived stress and self-regulation.

Table 1: Represents the pre intervention means and SDs of the dependent variables of the experimental and control groups and the *t* values.

Variables	Mean & SD		<i>t</i>
	Experimental group	Control group	
Perceived Stress	4.71 (2.23)	4.74 (2.241)	0.53
Self Regulation	227.74 (52.647)	228.37 (56.902)	.048

Table 2: Represents the post intervention means and SDs of the dependent variables of the experimental and control groups and the *t* values.

Variables	Mean & SD		<i>t</i>
	Experimental group	Control group	
Perceived Stress	2.89 (1.745)	4.97 (2.149)	4.458**
Self Regulation	229.17 (52.073)	227.46 (56.973)	0.131

** $p < 0.01$ level

Table 2 shows that there is a significant difference ($p < 0.01$) between the experimental group and the control group on perceived stress following the intervention. The perceived stress scores of the experimental group are significantly lower compared to the control group indicating that the yoga nidra intervention had an impact of the perceived stress levels. There is, however, no significant difference seen between the two groups on self-regulation (Table 2).

Table 3: Represents the pre and post intervention means and SDs of the dependent variables of the experimental group and the *t* values.

Variable	Mean & SD		Paired <i>t</i> values
	Pre-intervention	Post-intervention	
Perceived Stress	4.71 (2.23)	2.89 (1.74)	5.98**
Self Regulation	227.74 (52.64)	229.17 (52.07)	1.51

** $p < 0.01$ level

Paired *t* tests was carried out to test the within group difference. Significance of the difference between the means was carried out between the pre and post intervention scores of the experiment group for the two dependent variables (Table 3). It is observed that there was a significant decrease in the perceived stress scores after the yoga nidra intervention module.

DISCUSSION

In the present modern lifestyle, where psychological and psychosomatic problems are on the rise, the technique of yoga nidra may serve as a real boon for certain problems mankind. Most surprisingly, school teachers have been considered to be under stress and also undergoing the process of burnout. There exists a substantial body of literature describing teaching as stressful occupation and suggesting that teacher's stress and lack of self regulation appears to be an increasing problem. Anderson and Levinson (1999).

Therefore, the current study was planned to assess if the stresses faced by teachers could be remediated by offering meditation training to teacher trainees. This, it is hoped, will equip them to manage stresses better. Having established the equivalence of the experimental group and the control group (Table 1), the impact of yoga nidra intervention on perceived stress has clearly emerged (Table 2).

Earlier studies by Kumar (2004) demonstrated the effect of Yoga nidra on stress and reported a significant decrease in the stress level of the students. Weibel (2007) studied the effect of meditation on anxiety and stress and observed a significant decrease in the anxiety level of the students. However, there was a no significant difference in the self regulation. Lack of significant increase in self-regulation could have occurred as a result of the duration between the intervention and post-assessment. Post-assessment was carried out just 2 weeks following the intervention, not providing sufficient time for habits of self-regulation to become established and measurable.

Corcoran (2007) found that the practice of meditation leads to changes in emotional states which include reductions in anger, anxiety, fear, helplessness, emotional pain, and judgments. There are also increases in happiness, well-being, and compassion.

An earlier study by Rani, Tiwari and Agrawal (2013) also revealed significant difference in anxiety and perceived stress. However, there was no significant difference in self regulation.

CONCLUSION

From the present study it can be concluded that Yoga nidra meditation significantly reduced perceived stress in teacher trainees who underwent the intervention compared to a control group. There was a significant decrease in perceived stress in the intervention group following yoga nidra intervention. This study points to important implications that yoga nidra meditation may be included in the training program of teacher trainee as is seen to be a practical and effective strategy to combat stress.

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Acknowledgements

The authors profoundly appreciate all the people who have successfully contributed in ensuring this paper is in place. Their contributions are acknowledged however their names cannot be able to be mentioned.

Conflict of Interest

The authors colorfully declare this paper to bear not conflict of interests

How to cite this article: Lakshmipathy, S & Easvaradoss, V (2018). Impact of Yoga Nidra Meditation on Perceived Stress and Self Regulation in Teacher Trainees. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 6(3), 89-95. DIP:18.01.049/20180603, DOI:10.25215/0603.049