

## Role of Yoga and Meditation for Anxiety among Working Adults during COVID-19

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### ABSTRACT

The worldwide pandemic has caused a lot of chaos in everyone's life. Be it personal, social or occupational. Almost everyone is working from home with the overburdening of their work. The impact is observed to be on people's overall health. Elizabeth A.Hoge, et al., (2017) found out the effect of mindfulness meditation on occupational functioning and health care utilization in individuals with anxiety. The results showed that mindfulness medication is beneficial in improving occupational functioning and decrease healthcare utilization in adults with GAD. Monotonous daily routine of working from home in online mode for long stretches that too with no work life boundaries is causing anxieties. Further it is resulting in reduced concentration, creativity and productivity. The aim of the study was to examine the effect of yoga and meditation on anxiety and productivity among working adults during covid19 Pandemic. Through the review analysis, it has been observed that Yoga and Meditation has shown positive effects on anxiety reduction. People may include basic and easy yoga exercises in their daily routines to relax, to reduce or prevent anxieties and enhance creativity, performance and productivity. Various yoga and mindful meditations are among the most common ways to practice meditation and face the pandemic times to maintain positive mental health and wellbeing of working adults in organizations.

**Keywords:** Anxiety, Yoga, Meditation, Working Adults, Productivity, COVID-19 Pandemic

World Health Organization (March, 2020) declared Corona outbreak as a worldwide pandemic as by that time it had already affected 114 countries worldwide. To control the corona, outbreak many countries have undergone into nationwide lockdown. Due to this, daily routine has come to the halt. People have lost their jobs due to lockdown while those who are still working are working overtime. Since work from home is now a daily routine so there is no system to manage the number of hours given in the work. This has affected the personal, professional, social and all other areas of daily functioning.

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Sitting in front of the screen for longer stretches of time can form multiple problems such as back pain, headaches, eye straining, physical to mental exhaustion and what not. With no alternate way of working from home it has become tiring for people. Older adults working around the clock are also facing number of health issues. Pressure to complete work before deadline, attending online meeting, doing extra load of work can become a cause of anxiety.

Anxiety is an emotion that we feel when we are worried about something. Our body tenses up when it comes to physiological reaction and our mind gets fixated on the issues, we are worried about. It can make us hard to concentrate properly and can affect our mood and appetite as well. Anxiety is a general, unpleasant feeling of apprehension. When we're anxious, we may feel restless and experience physical reactions such as a headache, sweating, palpitations, chest tightness, and upset stomach. Anxiety is a normal human experience. In fact, it can be a potentially beneficial response in anticipation of dangerous situations. But when it starts taking toll on person's daily functioning it can cause more harm than good.

Normal anxiety can help us to perform better in different situation while when it is more than normal then it is called as problematic anxiety. It is chronic, irrational and interferes with much life function. Incessant worry, concentration problem may all stem from problematic anxiety.

As there is still no cure to the corona virus, going outside the house should be avoided as much as possible. So due to restricted activity people who used to release their stress and worries by going on a walk, going to gym, dance class or any recreational activities are now bounded by four walls. In this case it can be pretty difficult to find ways to deal with anxiety and stress. Therefore, adopting ways to release mental stress that too by being at home can be very helpful.

Since the lockdown has extended in many countries people are finding it difficult to find leisure activities. Working adults are feeling exhausted and over tired from work which is contributing in the degradation of mental and physical health. It should also be noticed that stress plays a major role in increasing the problematic anxiety.

There can be many reasons to feel anxious due to corona crises and lockdown few of them can be,

- Feeling of being stuck inside the home – Due to lack of movement outside the house there might be a sense of being stuck inside the house.
- Inability to meet our loved ones. Such as in the case of people who are living in another city for employment.
- Financial stress due to unemployment/ salary cut- Many people are losing jobs due to corona outbreak and hence this uncertainty of getting jobs back is also causing a state of constant worry and anxiety
- Total break on outdoor physical activities such as attending to sports, cycling, jogging or any outdoor activities
- Constant stress of work due to irregular working shifts.

These are the most common reasons of anxiety that working adults are facing currently. The impact that it is causing and people might be unaware of are,

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- Unable to focus properly, Forgetfulness – As anxiety is the constant worry about a thought or event as it can hamper the ability to concentrate and might contribute in constant forgetting
- Headaches and irritability – Excess worry and constant stress can create a lot of pressure that might result in physiological effect in the form of headache.
- Relationship/ family issues such as frequent argument- Stress and anxiety can often cause irritability and can cause frequent argument.
- Substance abuse – To cope up with difficult situations people often tend to opt for substances such as liquor or smoking. These are harmful to health and can cause distortion in cognition and perceptions.
- Declining of physical health- Overall, constant worry over a period of time can cause a state of complete exhaustion that can cause negative physiological changes.

To manage the level of anxiety at the time corona pandemic there can be many possible management techniques few can be as follows,

- As this pandemic can increase the level of worry among people due to false news so it is suggested to always follow a reliable source to stay updated.
- It is also necessary to eat a healthy balanced diet because the nutrition that we are taking helps in keeping physiological functions well maintained.
- Taking out time from daily work routine and spending time with ourselves can be very healing.
- One of the most performed activities is yoga and meditation. In which we can get to connect with ourselves

**Yoga-** Yoga not only helps in easing the physical body, but it can also help with anxious thoughts. Negative thinking patterns and frequent worries are common for those diagnosed with panic disorder and Anxiety. Meditation, visualization, and focusing on breathing can help with letting go of worry and fear. The overall practice of yoga can elicit the relaxation response, allowing both the body and mind to gain a sense of calm and ease.

**Meditation-** Meditation is an approach to training the mind, similar to the way that fitness is an approach to training the body. Meditation is different from yoga as yoga involves more physical movement and meditation focuses on the concentration and focusing with minimal physical movement. A study was conducted and it was seen that Anxiety was significantly reduced in every session that subjects who meditated. Brain imaging found that meditation-related anxiety relief was associated with activation of the anterior cingulate cortex, ventromedial prefrontal cortex, and anterior insula. These areas of the brain are involved with executive function and the control of worrying. Meditation-related activation of these three regions was directly linked to anxiety relief.

The relationship between yoga and meditation is quite unique. Yoga involves slow and composed body movements that helps us to loosen and relaxing our body making us feel more connected to ourselves and if we observe then meditation also has the initial step that requires concentration that eventually leads to connectedness and hence balancing of our energy. This is the reason that yoga and meditation done simultaneously then it can do wonders to your mind, body and soul

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Shirley Telles (2020) researched on positioning Yoga in Covid-19 pandemic. According to this research COVID 19 pandemic has impacted everyone's social and personal lives. The psychological distress during the pandemic has reported high prevalence of symptoms of psychological disorder and distress. During a conduction of progressive muscle relaxation on an experimental group of COVID 19 patients in China, it was found to be very beneficial in anxiety reduction. Based on the benefits of practicing progressive muscle tension, Yoga may be a potential psycho-social intervention to reduce anxiety and insomnia and positively impact immune responses in COVID-19 cases. The results of the study suggests that Yoga has a positive potential towards relaxation and anxiety reduction during COVID- 19 pandemic.

Simon Yat Ho Li and Daniel Bressington (2019) conducted a research on the effectiveness of mindfulness-based stress reduction on depression, anxiety, and stress in older adults. The result of this study shows positive effect of mindfulness on anxiety among older adults.

Zoogman Sara, Goldberg Simon B, Voursora Eleni, Diamond Mmathew C, Miller Lisa (2019) examined the effects of Yoga- based interventions for anxiety symptoms. The results of the study suggested that Yoga practice had a statistically significant effect on anxiety symptoms. It also suggested that yoga significantly decreases the anxiety symptoms.

Shirley Telles, Ram Kumar Gupta, Abhishek Kumar Bhardwaj, Nilkamal Singh, Prabhat Mishra, Deepak Kumar Pal and Acharya Balkrishna (2018) studied increased Mental Well-Being and Reduced State Anxiety in Teachers after Participation in a Residential Yoga Program. The study was conducted on a sample of 236 school teachers who practiced yoga for 15 days. The results of the study showed increased levels of mental wellbeing and lowered level in anxiety.

Romy Lauche, Dennis Anheyer, Karen Pilkington, Michael de Manincor, Gustav Dobos, Lesley Ward (2018) did a study on Yoga for anxiety. The aim of this research was to systematically assess and meta- analyze the effectiveness and safety of yoga on anxiety. The sample of the research was 319. The results of the research showed small effects on reduction on anxiety without treatment. It also suggested that there are no negative effects.

Nicole Butterfield, Tim Schultz, Philippa Rasmussen, Michael Proeve (2017) did a study on Yoga and Mindfulness for anxiety and depression. The aim of this research paper is to examine the role of Yoga in the management of anxiety and depression. The results give evidence supporting the use of yoga and mindfulness has indicated potential mechanism of change but needs more attention.

Alexxandria Keller (2017) did a systematic review of scientific evidence supporting yoga as an alternative treatment for generalized anxiety disorder. The results showed temporary effect on reduction of anxiety. It also suggested there should be more evidence for the potential efficacy of Yoga for mental health conditions.

Dr. Revati Deshpande (2017) examined a healthy way too handle work place stress through Yoga and Meditation. Stress can influence one's wellbeing, work execution, public activity and the relationship with relatives. This research paper gives strong evidence that Yoga and Meditation can be effective in reducing stress and anxiety at organizational level.

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Nualnong Wongtongkam, Branka Krivokapic- Skoko, Roderick Duncan and Mariagrazia Bellio (2017) did a study on the influence of mindfulness- based intervention on Job-Satisfaction and work- related stress and anxiety. This study examined the beneficial effects of mindfulness meditation on job work place stress. The result of the study suggested that mindfulness meditation should be promoted in organizational sectors to reduce work related stress.

Elizabeth A.Hoge, Brittany M.Guidos, Mihriye Mete, Eric Bui, Mark H. Pollack, Naomi M. Simon, Mary AnnDuttona (2017) did studied the effects of mindfulness meditation on occupational functioning and health care utilizations in working individuals with anxiety. The results show Mindfulness meditation training may improve occupational functioning and decrease healthcare utilization in adults with anxiety.

Megan K. Edwards, Simon Rosenbaum, and Paul D. Loprinzi (2017) studied Differential Experimental Effects of a Short Bout of Walking, Meditation, or Combination of Walking and Meditation on State Anxiety among working Adults. The results of the study showed significant decrease in the anxiety level of the working adults.

Elizabeth A.Hoge, et al., (2017) found out the effect of mindfulness meditation on occupational functioning and health care utilization in individuals with anxiety. The results showed that mindfulness medication is beneficial in improving occupational functioning and decrease healthcare utilization in adults with GAD.

Stefan G. Hofmann, Giovanbattista Andreoli, Joseph K. Carpenter, Joshua Curtiss (2016) did a research on Effect of Hatha Yoga on anxiety. The research suggests that hatha yoga can be an effective practice to reduce anxiety. The study was conducted on a sample of 501 participants who received hatha yoga and reported their levels of anxiety before and after. The results suggests that hatha yoga is very beneficial for anxiety reduction.

Atezaz Saeed, Karlene Cunningham and Richard (2016) did a research on Depression and Anxiety Disorders: Benefits of Exercise, Yoga, and Meditation According to this research many people turn to non-medical practices for anxiety and depression. Such as yoga, and meditation. The results of the study shows that there are no negative effects on people's health and can be beneficial in reduction of anxiety.

Lisa A. Uebelacker, Monika K. Broughton (2016) did a research on Yoga for Depression and Anxiety. There is expanding enthusiasm for the utilization of yoga as approach to oversee or treat anxiety and depression. Yoga is moderate, engaging, and open for some individuals. The results of the research paper suggested that there is preliminary evidence that Yoga may be helpful for depression and anxiety.

## **DISCUSSION**

The aim of the study was to examine the effect of yoga and meditation on anxiety and productivity among working adults during to Covid-19 Pandemic. Through the review analysis, it was observed that yoga and meditation has shown positive effects on anxiety reduction and productivity of employees.

There was a huge increase in anxiety rate among working adults during this COVID-19 pandemic. The comprehensive reviews have suggested during this period, reported a high range of symptoms of psychological distress and disorder among employees in various

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organizational sectors. The mental health professionals have also highlighted that there seemed to be the universal prevalence of frustration, anxiety, stress etc. due to coronavirus. This further led to the alarming stage of vulnerability in employees for seeking help from mental health professionals. The practitioners have also warned that the relationship between the COVID-19 and mental health problems are “bi-directional”, i.e., such illnesses are not merely consequences of the pandemic but an inability to deal with them can lead to the spread of COVID-19 infection.

Since, the COVID-19 pandemic working employees were directed to work from home with brief orientation to switch for online contribution if they wished to sustain in the jobs. Social connectedness only through online communication has reportedly led to increased exposure of social isolation, loneliness and agoraphobia for every individual. There is this fear of losing jobs among the people or they were asked to discontinue their jobs due to economical downfall in the market. Whether they have already lost their jobs or there was a constant fear of job security they were struggling with bill payments, with extra work load, increased screen time, the household chores which came along with expected challenge of maintaining work life balance specifically for married women employees. All this contributed to reduced social interactions with family and relatives which further led to frustration, impatience, and lack of concentration, poor mental and physical health such as fluctuation in blood pressure of the employees resulting into high level of anxiety.

Several techniques as coping mechanism were adopted to release frequently occurring stress and anxiety and attaining the steadiness of the body. Various literature reviews have supported that yoga and meditation has proven to be (Telles, 2020) beneficial for reduction of anxiety among working adults during COVID-19 pandemic. Yoga as a mind-body practice combines physical poses, controlled breathing, and meditation or relaxation which gives mental clarity (Telles, 2020). It significantly helps to reduce stress, lower blood pressure and controlled pulse rate. It can also enhance creativity, positive emotions, moods, performance and productivity. Thus, resulting in overall sense of happiness and well-being. Evidences supports (Wongtongkam, Skoko, Duncan and Bellio, 2017) that practicing yoga and meditation on regular basis may lead to improved work life balance, flexibility, range of motion and strength and management of chronic physical conditions. Yoga may help reduce risk factors for chronic physical illnesses such as heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure and many other lifestyle diseases (Hoge, 2017). Yoga might also help alleviate chronic conditions, such as depression, pain, anxiety and insomnia (Keller, 2017). Meditation has been shown to have mental benefits, such as improved focus, happiness, memory, self-control, academic performance and more. Yoga and meditation help in inculcating right attitude and approach to enhance our pandemic preparedness and epidemic proneness (Bhavanani, 2017). These practices served the purpose as therapeutic and non-pharmaceutical measure in times of crisis to maintain positive mental health and well-being of working employees in organizations.

### ***Recommendations***

- To start the practice of yoga and meditation sessions on daily basis and follow the routine for enhancing immunity and restore balanced mind and body.
- To create self-awareness for healthy emotional state and take frequent breaks while working online if required to maintain concentration, optimism and resilience and affective well-being.

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- To incorporate yoga into an organisational strategy through practitioners for collective experience of practicing yoga in the workplace that would help to reduce and mitigate stress of employees.

### CONCLUSION

The comprehensive review of research papers aimed to examine the role of yoga and meditation on anxiety of working employees during COVID-19. Huge positive impact of yoga and meditation has been seen for reducing of anxiety and work-related stress among employees during COVID-19 pandemic. The management strategy to cope under the conditions of social confinement can help to enhance self-awareness and self-potential to attain wellness of mind and body. Thus, the organisation can achieve optimum productivity and healthier workplace for its employees by promoting yoga and meditation even in the remote mode of working conditions.

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