

## Optimism and Psychological Well-Being among Yoga Practitioners

Shameema Abdul Azeez<sup>1\*</sup>, Husna K. V.<sup>2</sup>, Dr. Sandhya Aravind C.A.<sup>3</sup>

### ABSTRACT

Psychology is the science of behavior and mind, including consciousness and unconsciousness phenomena, as well as thought. The emerging field of positive psychology studies the positive impact that optimism has on mental health. Being optimistic, in the typical sense of the word, is defined as expecting the best possible outcome from any given situation. Psychological well-being refers to the simple notion of a person's welfare, happiness, advantages, interests, utility and quality of life. The main objective of the present study is to compare Optimism and Psychological Well-being in people who practice yoga and who do not practice yoga. Random sampling technique was used. A sample size of 30 yoga-practicing and 30 non-yoga-practicing people was selected for the present study. The tools used for data collection were, the Life Orientation Test – Revised (Scheier & Carver, 1985) and Ryff's Scale of Psychological Well-Being (RSPWB). Independent sample t-test was used for the analysis of data. The results show that optimism and psychological well-being were found to be higher for yoga practitioners.

**Keywords:** *Optimism, Psychological Well-being, Yoga Practitioners*

Psychology has influenced almost all fields of our life and living. The emergence of yoga in the field of psychology as an upcoming branch is imminent and inevitable in the present scenario when the entire stream of yoga is under the serious scrutiny by scientists of all hue and color. The word Yoga is existent for more than 5000 year. However, even today, it may be the most popular Indian word in the world. The term yoga is derived from the root 'Yuj' or 'Yujir' which means 'union'. The 'union' denotes that of individual soul with cosmic soul. According to another derivation word, yoga means 'concentration'. The word yoga has a rich collection of meanings both in ancient and contemporary science and literature.

Yoga is not a religion; it is a way of living that aims towards a healthy mind in a healthy body. Yoga helps to promote a balanced development of all the three forms of man as a being – physical, mental and spiritual. Yoga is a group of physical, mental and spiritual practices or disciplines which is originated in ancient India. Yoga is one of the six orthodox

<sup>1</sup>Student Counselor, The Indian High School, Al Garhoud Campus, Dubai, UAE.

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, Priyadarshini Arts & Science College, Malappuram.

<sup>3</sup>Faculty, Department of Psychology, Sree Sankaracharya University of Sanskrit, Kalady.

\*Corresponding Author

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schools of Hindu Philosophical traditions. There is a broad variety of yoga schools, practices and goals in Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. The term 'yoga' in the Western world often denotes a modern form of Hatha Yoga, consisting largely of the postures called asanas. Many studies have tried to determine the effectiveness of modern yoga as a complementary intervention for cancer, schizophrenia, asthma and heart diseases. The results of these studies have been mixed and inconclusive. On December 1, 2016, yoga was listed by UNESCO as an intangible cultural heritage. Yoga has found to have many physical benefits, but what is perhaps unknown to those consider yoga just another exercise form is that there is a growing body of research documenting yoga's psychological benefits. Several recent studies suggest that yoga may help strengthen social attachments, reduce stress and relieve anxiety, depression and insomnia. Thus, yoga has an influential role in the psychological well-being of a person, which may increase his optimism and life satisfaction.

At the most basic level, psychological well-being is quite similar to other terms that refer to positive mental states, such as happiness or satisfaction. Psychological well-being refers to inter and intra individual levels of positive functioning that can include one's relatedness with others and self-referent attitudes that include one's sense of mastery and personal growth. Psychological well-being consists of positive relationships with others,

personal mastery, autonomy, a feeling of purpose and meaning in life and personal growth and development. Psychological well-being is attained by achieving a state of balance affected by both challenging and rewarding life events. Psychological well-being has its foundations on eudemonic assumptions that suggest that well-being is related to whether individuals live their lives according to their true nature on spirit, reflected in earlier psychological theories such as Maslow's self-actualization theory. The Six-Factor Model of psychological well-being is a theory developed by Carol Ryff which determines six factors which contribute to an individual's psychological well-being, contentment and happiness. The six factors of psychological well-being are environmental mastery, personal growth, purpose in life, self-acceptance, positive relations with others and autonomy. Environmental mastery refers to the feelings of competence and capacity to manage and meet the responsibilities of everyday life. Personal growth refers to the capacity for continued development, potential and openness to experience. Purpose in life refers to the feelings of purpose and having a sense of life direction and that past and present experiences are meaningful. Self-acceptance is the capacity for accepting and acknowledging one's strengths and virtues as well as recognizing one's weaknesses. Positive relations with others refer to the sense that one has warm, satisfying and trusting relationships and are socially concerned. Autonomy refers to the extent to which one views oneself as self-determining and independent, resisting pressure to meet social expectation.

There are both positive and negative contributing factors for psychological well-being. Positive psychological well-being may emerge from numerous sources. A happy marriage is contributive, for example, as is a satisfying job or a meaningful relationship with another person. When marriage includes forgiveness, optimism expectations, positive thoughts about one's spouse and kindness, a marriage significantly improves psychological well-being. A propensity to unrealistic optimism and over-exaggerated self-evaluations can be useful. These positive illusions are especially important when an individual receives threatening negative feedback, as the illusions allow for adaptation in these circumstances to protect psychological well-being and self-confidence (Taylor and Brown, 1988). Optimism also can help an individual cope with stresses to their well-being.

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Psychological well-being can also be affected negatively, as in the case with a degrading and unrewarding work environment, unfulfilling obligations and unsatisfying relationships. Social interaction has a strong effect on well-being as negative social outcomes

are more strongly related to well-being than are positive social outcomes. Childhood traumatic experiences diminish psychological well-being throughout adult life, and can damage psychological resilience in children, adolescents and adults. Perceived stigma also diminished psychological well-being, particularly stigma in relation to obesity and other physical ailments or disabilities. Thus, positive psychological well-being predicts one's optimism and satisfaction.

Optimism is a mental attitude reflecting a belief or hope that the outcome of some specific endeavor, or outcome of some specific endeavor, or outcomes in general, will be positive, favorable and desirable. Optimism refers to an emotional and psychological perspective on life. It is a positive frame of mind and means that a person takes a view of expecting the best outcome from any given situation. The term derives from the Latin 'optimus', meaning 'best'. Being optimistic, in the typical sense of the word, is defined as expecting the best possible outcome from any given situation. This is usually referred to in psychology as dispositional optimism. It thus, reflects a belief that future conditions will work out for the best.

There are several theories that explain optimism. One theory of optimism is Dispositional Optimism, proposed by Charles Carver and Michael Scheier, which says that optimism is the global expectation that good things will be plentiful in the future and bad things scarce. They argued that optimism is associated with and leads to, securing positive whereas pessimism is associated with greater negative outcomes. Carver and Scheier see optimism as dispositional. They have found that optimists report fewer physical symptoms, better health habits and better coping strategies. Even among a group who had experienced the bad outcome of being diagnosed with breast cancer (Carver et al 1997) found that optimistic personality types experienced less distress, engaged in more active coping and were less likely to engage in avoidance or denial strategies.

Another approach of optimism is based on Seligman's famous "Learned Helplessness" research in the 70s and 80s, and the concept is called Explanatory Style. This was developed from the analysis and patterns of how people explained events that happened to them. Seligman developed attribution retraining to help people 'learn optimism'. According to this perspective, those who explain away bad events with internal (caused by themselves), stable (will continue to occur) and global (will happen in other spheres of life) causes are described as pessimistic whilst those who favor external, unstable and specific causes are described as optimistic. The theory was devised in the context of learned helplessness and as such, it may rely too heavily on the notion that the absence of pessimism creates optimism. The application of learned optimism focuses on reducing helplessness or depression through the cognitive therapy models developed by Beck (1967) and Ellis (Ellis and Harper, 1975).

Studies show that yoga practitioners showed higher level of happiness and mental balance compared to non-yoga practitioners. A few studies are listed under –

A systematic literature review and meta-analysis on effects of yoga on positive mental health among non-clinical adult population by Hendricks, Tom, De Jong, Joop, Cramer and Holger (2007) concluded yoga was found to contribute to a significant increase in

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psychological well-being when compared to no intervention but not compared to physical activity. For life satisfaction (emotional well-being), social relationships (social well-being) and mindfulness, no significant effects for yoga were found over active or non - active controls.

Moliver, Mika, Chartrand, Haussmann and Khalsa (2013) conducted a study to examine the extent to which psychological attitudes, transcendence, mental mastery and subjective vitality in a sample of female yoga practitioners over 45 years varied according to the length and frequency of yoga practice reveals that among non-probability sample of female yoga practitioners between 45 and 80 years, increased yoga experience predicted increased levels of psychological well-being. Results showed a dose-response effect, with yoga experience existing an increasingly protective effect against low levels of social well-being and vitality. Sukhsohale, Phatak, Sachin and Sanjay (2012) conducted a study to understand the effect of Raja Yoga Meditation on physiological and psychological well-being of subjects practicing it. Findings indicates that Raja yoga meditation provides significant improvements in physiological cardio-respiratory functions by tilting of automatic balance from sympathetic in favor of parasympathetic and also contribute significantly to the psychological well-being of subjects.

The findings of the study on prenatal yoga practices in late pregnancy and patterning of change in optimism, power and well-being, which was conducted by Pamela, East Carolina University (2011) supported field pattern diversity among women who practiced yoga during late pregnancy and manifested overtime as greater optimism, power and well-being.

### *Need and Significance of the present study*

Yoga is an ancient science having popularity in modern era. Yoga has been recognized as the preventive and curative modality which can complement it in managing stress and many other psychosomatic diseases. It also works as an effective practice to provide adequate exercise to the body. The present trend of life-style is changing and many researches brought out many more life styles factors like unwholesome food, lack of exercises and stress that govern the status of ill health. At this point of time, the scientific community is looking yoga for an appropriate remedy. The reason is that yoga are not just systems of medicine but they are also sciences of life which clearly touch every aspect of human sphere beyond the much-restricted circle of physical body. Among the various causes of modern lifestyle diseases, stress stands high above others and yoga has found its relevance in managing stress. Thus, the present study helps us to understand the importance of yoga in our physical and psychological health, which thereby, enhances our optimism, psychological well-being and quality of life.

### *Definitions of Key terms*

#### *Optimism*

Optimism can be defined as “reacting to problems with a sense of confidence and high personal ability.” Thus, optimistic people believe that negative events are temporary, limited in scope and manageable (Seligman, 1990).

In the present study, optimism means the scores obtained from the Life Orientation Test-Revised by Carver and Scheier (1985).

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### Psychological Well-being

Psychological well-being can be defined as “the eudemonic perspective of well-being. Specifically, the construct of psychological well-being refers to perceived self-actualization and optimal functioning” (Ryff, 1989).

In the present study, psychological well-being means the total score obtained by the six subscales of psychological well-being developed by Carol Ryff (1989).

### Yoga Practitioners

A yoga practitioner is a person with the ability, experience, insight, knowledge, qualifications, skills and training to perform the role of a practitioner in the discipline and exercise of yoga (Harmonius, 2017).

In the present study, yoga practitioners were taken as the participants.

### Objectives

1. To find out the optimism among yoga practitioners and non-yoga practitioners.
2. To find out the psychological well-being among yoga practitioners and non-yoga practitioners.

### Problem

To study the optimism and psychological well-being among yoga practitioners.

### Hypotheses

1. There will be significant difference in optimism among yoga practitioners and non-yoga practitioners.
2. There will be significant difference in psychological well-being among yoga practitioners and non-yoga practitioners.

## METHOD

### Participants

The participants of this study consist of 30 yoga practitioners and 30 non-yoga practitioners from Malappuram district of Kerala state. Purposive random sampling method was used for data collection.

### Instruments

1. **Life Orientation Test – Revised** – Life Orientation Test – Revised (LOT-R) was developed by M.F. Scheier and C.S. Carver (1994). The scale consists 10 items and was developed to assess individual differences in generalized optimism versus pessimism. This measure has been used in a good deal of research on the behavioral, affective and health consequences of the Optimism/Pessimism dimension. Each item is scored 0-4 and the total score is the sum of all 6 (non-filler) items. Test-retest reliability of this scale was found to be good (ICC=0.72), varying across gender, race, ethnicity, education, employment and income (ICC Range = 0.24 – 0.85). Criterion validity was strong; the LOT-R was significantly negatively correlated with hopelessness ( $r = 0.65, p < 0.001$ ) and depression ( $r = -0.60, p < 0.001$ ).
2. **Ryff’s Psychological Well-Being Scale** – Ryff’s Psychological Well-Being Scale (RPWBS) was developed by Carol D. Ryff (1989). The scale consists of 42 items and it measures six aspects of well-being and happiness viz., autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relation with others, purpose in life

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and self- acceptance. The test-retest reliability coefficient of RPWBS was 0.82. The subscales of self-acceptance, positive relation with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life and personal growth were found to be 0.71,.0.77,.0.78,.0.77, 0.70, and 0.78 respectively, which were statistically significant ( $p<0.001$ ). The construct validity was found to be higher as 0.80.

- 3. Personal Data Sheet** – Personal information like age, sex and occupation of the participants were collected using personal data sheet.

### *Procedure*

The investigator collected the data from various yoga institutions in Malappuram district. The prior permission was taken from the corresponding authorities and the participants were explained about the aim of the study and the procedure before collecting the data. After completion, the research instruments were collected back and checked for incompleteness. Scoring was done as per the manual and entered into a spread sheet for further statistical analysis.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The objective of the study was to find out whether there is any significant difference in optimism and psychological well-being among yoga and non-yoga practitioners. To find out the significant difference, descriptive statistics was calculated and the results are presented in the following tables.

**Table 1 Mean, Standard Deviation and t-value of the scores in optimism among yoga practitioners and non-yoga practitioners.**

| Variable | Group                  | N  | Mean  | Std. Deviation | t-value  |
|----------|------------------------|----|-------|----------------|----------|
| Optimism | Yoga Practitioners     | 30 | 15.80 | 2.952          | 2.7883** |
|          | Non-Yoga Practitioners | 30 | 13.67 | 2.975          |          |

*\*\*Significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed)*

Table 1 represents mean, standard deviation and t-value of the scores in optimism among yoga practitioners and non-yoga practitioners. The result shows that there exists a high significant difference between yoga and non-yoga practitioners in their optimism at 1% level. From the results, it can be seen that optimism was found to be higher ( $M=15.80$ ) for those who practices yoga than those who are not practicing yoga ( $M=13.67$ ). This may be because the participants focused on coping strategies provided by yoga techniques dealt with stress and anxiety and thereby, they began to perceive positive learning experiences in almost any situation. They may also began to recognize their own growth and their attitude towards themselves, others and their environment begin to change, which can make them optimistic towards themselves, their life and even with others.

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**Table 2 Mean, Standard Deviation and t-value of the scores in psychological well-being along with its subscales among yoga practitioners and non-yoga practitioners.**

| Variables                | Group                  | N  | Mean   | Std. Deviation | t-value |
|--------------------------|------------------------|----|--------|----------------|---------|
| Autonomy                 | Yoga Practitioners     | 30 | 28.10  | 6.525          | 3.039** |
|                          | Non-Yoga Practitioners | 30 | 23.43  | 5.309          |         |
| Environmental Mastery    | Yoga Practitioners     | 30 | 29.60  | 4.598          | 2.176*  |
|                          | Non-Yoga Practitioners | 30 | 27.07  | 4.417          |         |
| Personal Growth          | Yoga Practitioners     | 30 | 34.63  | 4.319          | 4.766** |
|                          | Non-Yoga Practitioners | 30 | 29.07  | 4.719          |         |
| Positive relations       | Yoga Practitioners     | 30 | 32.33  | 3.986          | 3.090** |
|                          | Non-Yoga Practitioners | 30 | 28.10  | 6.359          |         |
| Purpose in Life          | Yoga Practitioners     | 30 | 32.23  | 4.248          | 4.138** |
|                          | Non-Yoga Practitioners | 30 | 27.27  | 5.017          |         |
| Self-acceptance          | Yoga Practitioners     | 30 | 31.33  | 5.202          | 2.424*  |
|                          | Non-Yoga Practitioners | 30 | 28.37  | 4.230          |         |
| Psychological Well-Being | Yoga Practitioners     | 30 | 186.33 | 22.264         | 4.825** |
|                          | Non-Yoga Practitioners | 30 | 159.03 | 21.561         |         |

\*\*Significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed)

\*Significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Table 2 represents mean, standard deviation and t-value of the scores in psychological well-being along with its subscales among yoga and non-yoga practitioners. The result shows that there exists significant difference between yoga and non-yoga practitioners in psychological well-being at 1% level. From the results, it can be seen that the total score for psychological well-being was found to be higher in yoga practitioners (M=186.33) than that of non-yoga practitioners (M=159.03). The subscales of psychological well-being viz autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations, purpose in life and self-acceptance was also found to be higher among yoga practitioners than non-yoga practitioners. The autonomy, personal growth, positive relations and purpose in life was found to be significant at 1% level. This may be because the practice of yoga significantly decreases anxiety and depression and thereby, improves psychological well-being of the individual. The subscales environmental mastery and self-acceptance was found to be significant at 5% level. This may be because the practice of yoga might significantly improve their Quality of Life and thereby, enhances their Psychological well-being.

All these significances may be because the practice of yoga affects their mental and physical health positively and thereby, it raises their optimism and well-being level. As non- yoga practitioners do not perform yoga, there may not get benefits of yoga practice and thus, have low level of optimism and psychological well-being.

### **CONCLUSION**

Yoga is a way of healthy living which includes both physical and mental exercises. People who practice yoga regularly has found to have a healthy and peaceful life. The present study was conducted on yoga practitioners and non-yoga practitioners attempts to measure their optimism and psychological well-being. The study revealed that optimism and psychological well-being have an influence on both groups. Optimism and psychological well-being are high in yoga practitioner. The study has more benefits to yoga practitioners because they can understand and measure the level of optimism and psychological well- being. Nowadays, as

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the practice of yoga increases, the degree of optimism and psychological well-being is also high to the study findings can reveal which group has got the benefits of yoga.

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### Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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