

**Comparative Study**

## **A Comparative Study on the Level of Optimism of Yoga Practitioners and Non-Practitioners**

K. Madhava Chandran<sup>1\*</sup>, P. Unniraman<sup>2</sup>, K. K. Unnikrishnan<sup>3</sup>

### **ABSTRACT**

Optimism is a mental attitude characterized by hope and confidence in success and a positive future. Studies have reported the influence of yoga in promoting optimism. This study was carried out among 50 yoga practitioners (experimental group) attending a yoga class at Patanjali Yoga Research Centre, Kozhikode, Kerala, India and the control group of 50 people who were not practicing yoga. Data was collected using a questionnaire containing the measure of the level of optimism and the characteristics of yoga practitioners, namely, sex, age, marital status, whether did yoga before joining the present class, months of yoga practice in this class, and whether they were having any psychological problem at present. There exists statistically significant difference between the comparatively higher mean total optimism score of yoga practitioners and the lower score of the non-practitioners, indicating that yoga practitioners are more optimistic than those who do not do yoga. Statistically significant difference exists in the total optimism score of yoga practitioners based on sex, age, marital status, whether they did yoga before joining the present yoga class, and whether they are having psychological problem at present. Males get higher score than females, comparatively younger yoga practitioners get more score than those in the higher age group, unmarried yoga practitioners get higher score than married people, those who have done yoga before joining the present yoga class get higher score than those who have not done it before, and those who have psychological problem at present get lower score than those who do not have the problem. Majority of the yoga practitioners have experienced most of the optimism related feelings to a good extent, compared to most of the non-practitioners, who have experienced them to a lesser extent only. The effect of yoga in helping the practitioners to achieve better optimism in their life, compared to those who have not done yoga is evident from this study.

**Keywords:** *Optimism, Yoga Practitioners, Non-Practitioners*

**O**ptimism is a mental attitude characterized by hope and confidence in success and a positive future. An optimistic person thinks that the best possible thing will happen, and hopes for it even if it is not likely to happen. This mentality allows us to keep our goals and dreams in play so we can act on the motivation to keep working towards them. Because of this, optimistic people feel more in control of their situations and have higher self-

<sup>1</sup>Ph.D., Independent Social Researcher, Kozhikode, Kerala, India

<sup>2</sup>Yogacharya, Patanjali Yoga Research Centre, Kozhikode

<sup>3</sup>Yoga Instructor, Patanjali Yoga Research Centre, Kozhikode

\*Corresponding Author

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## A Comparative Study on the Level of Optimism of Yoga Practitioners and Non-Practitioners

esteem. The opposite of optimism is pessimism. Pessimistic people expect a situation to turn out in a bad way, expecting the worst to happen.

Yoga promotes mindfulness and presence, boosts self-confidence, strengthens relationships, enhances attentiveness, reduces irritability and fosters an optimistic outlook in life. As a result, yoga practitioners usually experience greater relaxation and optimism, empowering them to focus better on their life and work. Optimism was reportedly higher for yoga practitioners, when compared to non-practitioners (Azeez et al, 2023). Yoga practice could provide a healthy and positive alternative from depressing negative thoughts, and give the practitioners a sense of purpose and hope in life (Meena Ramanathan et al, 2017). A review of psychosocial effects of yoga have found that yoga promotes positive effects at psychosocial level, contributing to an effective improvement of different life competencies and well-being, and consequently of the quality of life of those who practice it (Caterina and Rosado, 2017.)

### METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out among 50 yoga practitioners (experimental group) who were attending a yoga class at Patanjali Yoga Research Centre, Kozhikode, Kerala, India. The control group consisted of 50 people who were not practicing yoga. Data was collected from them using a questionnaire containing the measure of level of optimism (Rachel et al, 2019), which includes feelings related to optimism and the characteristics of the yoga practitioners, namely, sex, age, marital status, whether did yoga before joining the present class, months of yoga practice in this class, and whether they were having any psychological problem at present. The responses elicited for the optimism related feelings were: Strongly agree, Agree much, Slightly agree, Disagree much, Strongly disagree, which were scored from 5 to 1 respectively. The data was analysed as scores, percentage of respondents reporting and through Statistical test.

### RESULTS

Table 1 gives details of the total score for optimism of yoga practitioners and non-practitioners.

**Table 1. Total score for optimism of yoga practitioners and non-practitioners**

| Total score for optimism* | Respondents (%) | Total score for optimism*       | Respondents (%) |
|---------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------------|-----------------|
| Yoga practitioners        |                 | Respondents not practicing yoga |                 |
| 77.1 - 80.0               | 50              | 57.1 - 60.0                     | 90              |
| 82.9                      | 50              | 65.7                            | 10              |
| Total                     | 100             | Total                           | 100             |

\*expressed as % of the maximum possible score under the study

Table 2 shows the statistical significance of the difference in total score for optimism of yoga practitioners and non-practitioners.

**Table 2. Statistical significance of the difference in total score for optimism of yoga practitioners and non-practitioners**

| Mean total score for optimism         |                   |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Yoga practitioners                    | Non-practitioners |
| 28.3                                  | 21.0              |
| t stat = 19.9; significant $p < 0.01$ |                   |

## A Comparative Study on the Level of Optimism of Yoga Practitioners and Non-Practitioners

Statistical significance of the difference in total optimism score of yoga practitioners and non-practitioners based on their characteristics such as age, marital status, doing yoga before joining the present yoga class, and existence of psychological problem at present are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3. Statistical significance of the difference in total score for optimism of yoga practitioners based on their characteristics**

|   |   |
|---|---|
| Mean total score for optimism of yoga practitioners |   |
| Males   | Females   |
| 28.6  | 27.0  |
| t stat = 8.9; significant $p < 0.01$                |   |
| Mean total score for optimism of yoga practitioners |   |
| Age group (years)                                   |   |
| 18-26   | 35-40   |
| 28.8  | 27.0  |
| t stat = 10.7; significant $p < 0.01$               |   |
| Mean total score for optimism of yoga practitioners |   |
| Unmarried   |   |
| 28.8  | Married   |
|   | 27.3  |
| t stat = 6.5; significant $p < 0.01$                |   |
| Mean total score for optimism of yoga practitioners |   |
| Did yoga before joining the present yoga class      |   |
| 29.0  | Did not do yoga before joining the present yoga class |
|   | 28.1  |
| t stat = 2.9; significant $p < 0.05$                |   |
| Mean total score for optimism of yoga practitioners |   |
| Has psychological problem at present                |   |
| 27.3  | Does not have psychological problem at present        |
|   | 28.7  |
| t stat = - 3.6; significant $p < 0.05$              |   |

Table 4 gives details of the scores for various optimism related feelings of yoga practitioners and non-practitioners and the statistical significance of the difference in scores between the two groups.

**Table 4. Scores for optimism related feelings of yoga practitioners and non-practitioners**

| Optimism related feeling   | Mean score         |                   | t stat and statistical significance |
|--|--------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------------|
|  | Yoga practitioners | Non-practitioners |                                     |
| I am feeling optimistic about life's challenges                                | 4.0                | 3.1               | 3.9<br>$p < 0.01$                   |
| Right now, I expect things to work out for the best                            | 3.7                | 3.1               | 2.5<br>$p < 0.05$                   |
| I am feeling optimistic about my future  | 4.3                | 3.2               | 5.4<br>$p < 0.01$                   |
| I feel that something good will happen today                                   | 3.3                | 2.5               | 3.5<br>$p < 0.01$                   |
| The future is looking bright to me   | 4.5                | 3.1               | 7.2<br>$p < 0.01$                   |
| At the moment, I expect more to go right than wrong when it comes to my future | 4.1                | 3.0               | 11.0<br>$p < 0.01$                  |
| I am expecting things to turn out well   | 4.4                | 3.0               | 8.5<br>$p < 0.01$                   |

## A Comparative Study on the Level of Optimism of Yoga Practitioners and Non-Practitioners

Table 5 shows the responses of yoga practitioners to the optimism related feelings. Table 6 gives the responses of people who are not practicing yoga to the optimism related feelings.

**Table 5. Responses of yoga practitioners to optimism related feelings**

| Optimism related feeling   | Yoga practitioners (%) reporting |            |                |               |                   |
|--|----------------------------------|------------|----------------|---------------|-------------------|
|  | Strongly agree                   | Agree much | Slightly agree | Disagree much | Strongly disagree |
| I am feeling optimistic about life's challenges                                | 20                               | 60         | 20             | Nil           | Nil               |
| Right now, I expect things to work out for the best                            | Nil                              | 70         | 30             | Nil           | Nil               |
| I am feeling optimistic about my future  | 30                               | 70         | Nil            | Nil           | Nil               |
| I feel that something good will happen today                                   | Nil                              | 30         | 70             | Nil           | Nil               |
| The future is looking bright to me   | 50                               | 50         | Nil            | Nil           | Nil               |
| At the moment, I expect more to go right than wrong when it comes to my future | 10                               | 90         | Nil            | Nil           | Nil               |
| I am expecting things to turn out well   | 40                               | 60         | Nil            | Nil           | Nil               |

**Table 6. Responses of those who are not practicing yoga to optimism related feelings**

| Optimism related feeling   | Respondents (%) reporting |            |                |               |                   |
|--|---------------------------|------------|----------------|---------------|-------------------|
|  | Strongly agree            | Agree much | Slightly agree | Disagree much | Strongly disagree |
| I am feeling optimistic about life's challenges                                | Nil                       | 10         | 90             | Nil           | Nil               |
| Right now, I expect things to work out for the best                            | Nil                       | 20         | 70             | 10            | Nil               |
| I am feeling optimistic about my future  | Nil                       | 20         | 80             | Nil           | Nil               |
| I feel that something good will happen today                                   | Nil                       | Nil        | 50             | 50            | Nil               |
| The future is looking bright to me   | Nil                       | 10         | 90             | Nil           | Nil               |
| At the moment, I expect more to go right than wrong when it comes to my future | Nil                       | Nil        | 100            | Nil           | Nil               |
| I am expecting things to turn out well   | Nil                       | Nil        | 100            | Nil           | Nil               |

## DISCUSSION

50 % of yoga practitioners have a total optimism score in the range of 77.1 to 80 % of the maximum possible score under the study, while 50% have a score of 82.9 (Table 1). However, 90 % of those who have not done yoga have a comparatively lower score in the range of 57.1 to 60 % of the maximum possible score only (Table 1). Table 2 shows statistically significant

## A Comparative Study on the Level of Optimism of Yoga Practitioners and Non-Practitioners

difference between the total optimism score of yoga practitioners (28.3) and non-practitioners (21.0). These results indicate that the level of optimism of the yoga practitioners is more than that of those who have not done yoga.

Statistically significant difference exists between the total optimism score of yoga practitioners based on sex, age, marital status, whether they did yoga before joining the present yoga class, and whether they are having psychological problem at present (Table 3). The mean total optimism score of males is comparatively more than that of females, the mean score of those in the lower age group is more than the score of the higher age group, unmarried yoga practitioners have a higher mean total optimism score than married people, and those who report doing yoga before joining the present yoga class get a comparatively higher mean score than those who have not done yoga before (Table 3). More experience in yoga practice in improving positive emotions and reducing negative emotions has been observed (Madhava Chandran et al, 2023). Years of yoga practice was found to favour reduced mental arousal (Mocanu et al, 2018). Yoga practitioners having psychological problem now are getting a lower mean total optimism score than those who do not have such a problem (Table 3). Meditative and cognitive aspects of yoga could be problematic for patients with psychotic or personality disorders (Arndt Bussing et al, 2012).

There is not much difference in the mean total optimism score of respondents having different durations of yoga practice in the present class, with no statistically significant difference also observed between their scores under the study.

Statistically significant difference exists in the scores for all the optimism related feelings between yoga practitioners and non-practitioners, with the former group getting a higher score (Table 4). The mean score of yoga practitioners for the following five out of seven feelings is in the range of 4 to 4.5 (Table 4), indicating that they “agree much” to these optimism related parameters.

1. I am feeling optimistic about life’s challenges
2. I am feeling optimistic about my future
3. The future is looking bright to me
4. At the moment, I expect more to go right than wrong when it comes to my future
5. I am expecting things to turn out well

This is further substantiated from the data in Table 5, which shows that except for one feeling, majority of the yoga practitioners have “agreed much” to all the other optimism related feelings. This means that the yoga practitioners have experienced most of the feelings to a good extent. However, the mean score for the five feelings mentioned above for people who have not done yoga is in the range of 3 to 3.2 only (Table 4), indicating that they “agree slightly” only to these optimism related feelings. This is further established from the data in Table 6, which shows that in the case of those who have not practiced yoga, majority have “agreed slightly” only to most of the feelings. This means that they have not been able to experience optimism to the same extent as that of yoga practitioners.

The above mentioned results establish the fact that yoga practitioners have experienced most of the optimism related feelings in a comparatively better manner than those who have not done yoga.

## CONCLUSION

The influence of yoga in helping the practitioners to develop a better level of optimism in their life, as compared to those who have not practiced yoga is evident from this study.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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