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Research Paper

Heart Ailments and Yoga: Is there a Cure?

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ABSTRACT

The present study explored the therapeutic potential of Yoga in the management of heart ailments. Thirty-one patients with diagnosed heart conditions and thirty-two healthy individuals were included as the experimental and control groups, respectively. Yoganidra, a therapeutic relaxation technique developed by Swami Satyanand Saraswati of the Munger Yoga Ashram, was employed as the independent variable for the experimental group to assess its impact. Quality of life questionnaire developed by WHO served to cater to the needs of the dependent variable. It was hypothesized that Yoganidra would produce a significant positive effect on patients with cardiac ailments. Findings revealed a remarkable improvement in the symptoms of patients, irrespective of demographic variations. The results have been interpreted in the context of previous research in this domain, supporting the role of Yoga as a complementary therapeutic intervention for lifestyle-related and psychosomatic illnesses.

Keywords: *Yoga and heart disease, heart disease and Yoga, Yoga and lifestyle ailments, Yoga and psychosomatic illnesses, Lifestyle, Yoga and outcome*

Psychosomatic diseases, as the name clearly indicates, are illnesses in which the root cause lies in the mind, while the symptoms manifest in the body-often in vital organs such as the heart, stomach, and skin. In recent times, psychologists across the world have emphasized that this area requires deeper research, as psychosomatic disorders are not only severe in nature but also affect a large segment of the global population.

The term psyche refers to the mind or soul, while soma denotes the body. Together, they reflect the intricate connection between mental and physical health. When this connection functions negatively, it impacts an individual's overall well-being in a holistic manner. The heart, in particular, becomes a soft target for such disturbances, making cardiac conditions a major concern in the domain of psychosomatic illnesses.

Interestingly, both developing and developed nations are facing similar challenges related to lifestyle and stress-induced disorders. The fallout of these conditions is visible at multiple levels affecting the body, disturbing mental peace, and ultimately influencing society as a whole. In India, several studies have examined the causes and consequences of lifestyle diseases, especially heart-related issues. (Saraswati& Hiti 1984, Saraswati 1997, Selvamrthy 19971, Saraswati 1996).

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Yoga is an ancient life science and mindfulness-based practice originated in Indian subcontinent. The word "yoga" is derived from the Sanskrit root "yuj" which means a union. Yoga is the union of human spirit and transcendental spirit. It is considered as a way of life and art of self-discovery and self-transformation. Yoga affects all the aspects of life: physical, emotional, psychic and spiritual (Satyananda, 1969). It comprises of yogic postures (also known as *Asanas*), breathing exercises (also known as *Pranayama*) and meditation. In Indian tradition, yoga is much more than a physical exercise. It also includes a meditative and spiritual core. Yoga is the science of the right living intended to be integrated in daily life.

Existing literature in yogic sciences strongly suggests positive impact of yogic practices on physical and psychological conditions. A study by Potey et al. (2016) was conducted to assess the effects of 3 months of yoga practice on cortisol level and cardiovascular reactivity as a result of examination among medical students. The students (n=40) were divided into two groups: yoga (n=20) and control (n=20). Students in the yoga group were asked to attend an hour long yoga class for 12 weeks. Both the groups were assessed at the baseline and end of the study. The results showed that there is a significant reduction in the serum cortisol, systolic and diastolic blood pressure and pulse rate among students who attended the yoga classes (Potey, Rahul, Chanda, Sanjeev, & Mahapatra, 2016). Regular practices help in reducing psychological distress. Eastman-Mueller et al. (2013) found significant differences in perceived stress, worry and depressive symptoms in a students' group study conducted over a period of one week. Yoga is a holistic approach which not only aims to reduce or treat misery; rather it helps in inculcating more positive behaviors. A study on nursing students shows that yoga practices have positive impact on overall psychological functioning (Mathad, Pradhan, & Sasidharan, 2017). Yoga practices improve mindfulness, self-compassion and other positive attributes and character strengths.

These studies indicate a strong link between mental stress and heart functioning. The objective of the present investigation was to re-evaluate whether psychological problems significantly influence cardiac health. Accordingly, the hypothesis proposes that yogic intervention brings about a significant improvement in the condition of heart patients.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The sample consisted of 32 subjects in the experimental group and 31 subjects in the control group all residents of Bhagalpur town. In this study only male candidate was included. Age range of the subject was 30 to 35 years. Socio-economic Status was constant. Only middle-class families, with income ranging from ₹18,000 to ₹30,000 per month were included in the present study. The convenient sampling technique was utilized for selecting volunteers in order to facilitate the easy collection of data from the subjects concerned.

A list of probable volunteers was obtained from 14 physicians of Bhagalpur, both private practitioners as well as those working in the Bhagalpur Medical College. They were individually contacted and requested to help in the study, which holds significance for the aged citizens of the town. Thus, out of 54 probable volunteers for the experimental group, 32 gave their consent for participation. Likewise, in the control group, out of 67 probable volunteers, 31 agreed to cooperate. It took 67 days in all to obtain the requisite number of subjects as volunteers. The volunteers were briefly informed about the significance of the study and were requested to lend their support through honest and sincere responses.

Research design: In present study a between group design was used.

Tools

- **Personal Data Sheet***:* personal data sheet was prepared to solicit relevant information such as age, sex, family type, family size, literacy, area of residence (Bhagalpur town), and socio-economic status (middle class) for eliciting the required information from the subjects.
- **Yoganidra:** Yoganidra, a modern holistic technique developed by Swami Satyananda Saraswati of the Munger Ashram, was used. This technique is widely utilized across the world and is considered one of the most popular methods for inducing physiological and mental relaxation. In this technique, the participant is requested to lie down in Shavasana (the corpse pose), with the feet placed about one foot apart and the palms facing upwards. After closing the eyes, the participants are instructed to mentally focus on each part of the body and attempt to relax it as much as possible. This technique has been found to induce a state in which the person is neither fully awake nor completely asleep—a state known as hypnagogic in psychological terminology. A 30-minute Yoganidra cassette by Swami Niranjananda Saraswati of Munger was utilized for this purpose. In Yoganidra, Sankalpa (auto-suggestion) is also an essential component of the process. It is considered highly desirable, useful, and greatly effective.
- **WHO Quality of Life questionnaire**: A brief or short version of the WHO Quality of Life questionnaire (1997) was used to assess the quality of life of individuals in both groups. This questionnaire contains 26 items related to various aspects of quality of life and covers four major domains: Physical, Mental, Social and, Environmental. In this test, only 24 items are scored, whereas Items 1 and 2 are treated as fillers and are therefore not included in the scoring process. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the questionnaire has been reported to range between 0.59 and 0.85, indicating acceptable internal consistency. Confirmatory factor analysis has shown reasonably high validity for the questionnaire, suggesting that it is suitable for use in research. Each item in the test consists of five alternative responses, ranging from "completely agree" to "little agree." A higher score indicates a higher quality of life, while a lower score signifies a comparatively poorer quality of life.

Data Collection

The data collection was accomplished rather arduously over a period of 38 days, during which certain problems arose. However, they were dealt with professionally and adequately.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 showing results of the effect of yoganindra on heart patients before and after treatment.

Condition	Number	Mean	Sd	't' ratio
Experimental	32	4.27	0.74	
Control	31	2.66	0.66	11.04

<0.01

A perusal of the above table indicates that, as hypothesized earlier, the experimental group benefitted from the yogic intervention in the form of Yoganindra and its effect on the quality of life. The control group, on the other hand, was not subjected to any experimental

intervention. As indicated earlier, the results thus obtained are in line with previous data on this topic. Hence, it can be surmised that yoga can indeed induce deep relaxation in the subjects and bring about qualitative changes in their life. Thus, the hypothesis was confirmed.

Through the use of a number of different processes, Yoga Nidra is able to successfully promote state of mind and body relaxation. Additionally, Yoga Nidra invigorates the activity of the alpha brain wave, which is linked to a state of mind that is peaceful and relaxed. Due to the fact that the mind and the body are intricately intertwined, the act of physically relaxing oneself naturally has a calming impact on them. Reducing overall physical and mental activity, the autonomic nervous system (ANS) strives toward equilibrium while the central nervous system (CNS) begins to slow down. When there is less effort put forward by the muscles and the nervous system, the metabolic rate drops. During this condition of profound relaxation, the muscles become more pliable, and vasodilation brings to the expansion of blood vessels. This results in a decrease in cardiac output and less strain on the heart, which is reflected in a decrease in both systolic and diastolic blood pressure as well as a slower beating rate. In addition, the oxygen requirement of the body reduces, which results in a slower cardiac rate. Not only that, but Yoga Nidra has the potential to be an effective preventative measure against ischaemic heart disease, which is often known as the "silent killer." In order to lessen the impact of sickness, it is of the utmost importance to place an emphasis on stress management and the reduction of negative emotional states. This is due to the fact that stress is linked to a wide variety of diseases. Through the practice of Yoga Nidra, which is characterised by mental relaxation (Shashikiran et al., 2022; Li et al., 2019), dominance of the alpha electrocardiogram has been discovered.

CONCLUSION

It can be hence concluded that Yoganīdra, as a technique of deep relaxation, does indeed contribute to a better quality of life for those who opt for it.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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