

Yoga as a Predictor of Self-Compassion in Adolescents – Endeavors for Positive Growth and Development

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ABSTRACT

The global epidemic and persistent efforts to revolutionize and develop as humanity has led to thorough mechanization of mankind. Schools today are witnessing the ever increasing academic benchmarks and students' desire to be atop which has taken a toll on their physical and mental well-being, further leading to a state of disequilibrium in their homeostatic responses. However, the nature of stressors leading to this disequilibrium varies in relation with the age range and the developmental phase subjective to every child. Apart from changing trends in the rising problems, there has also been a change observed in the ways prescribed to battle them successfully. These techniques have too evolved with their focus being deduced from curing the physical body to curing one's inner self. This systematic review was done in relation with Adolescents and how they can cultivate a sense of Self-Compassion, so as to strengthen themselves to be more accepting and comfortable with a status of mediocrity in academics, as well as to face and overcome their personal or academic inadequacies positively. This study is an orchestration to explore the effects of incorporating Yoga and its related practices in schools so as to predict Self-Compassion among adolescents. The review highlights important implications drawn from studies done in India and across the Globe.

Keywords: *Yoga, Self-Compassion and Positive Schooling.*

The permeation of globalization and persistent human efforts to evolve has led to thorough mechanization of mankind. Pacing up with growing modernization today has led to phenomenal changes in lives of individuals at physical, emotional, cultural, social and spiritual levels. These changes can be witnessed in all individuals irrespective of the age factor. In light of the same this paper is an effort to draw upon researchers' attention towards the concept of Schooling and how it can be shaped into a more positive experience for growing adolescents. Education today is seen as a need of the hour and an essential prerequisite to have a standing anywhere in the vertical of professional life or to even attain the most basic level of awareness. Schools

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nowadays are witnessing the ever increasing academic benchmarks and the rising burden on students' striving to be atop with them. This competent environment has taken a huge toll on their physical and mental well-being, thereby leading to an imbalance in their homeostatic responses, with severe psychological and pathological conditions in some. This trend of rising stress and its management, however, is subjective to the ability and personality type of every adolescent with the majority being bold enough to handle it well, and an exceptional minority which tends to succumb to the pressure.

This systematic review was done in relation with Adolescents and how they can cultivate a sense of Self-Compassion, so as to strengthen themselves to be more accepting of their personal and academic inadequacies, and with bearing a status of mediocrity in academics in comparison to the exceptionally bright ones. (Neff K. , 2011) Self-Compassion is extending empathy to one's self in the face of inadequacy, distress, or general enduring, instead of being mercilessly judgmental and self-critical for various shortcomings. Self-Compassion entails having three elements namely- Self-Kindness, Common Humanity and Mindfulness with their contrary counterparts, Self-Judgment, Isolation and Over Identification, respectively. That is, being gentle and accepting towards one's imperfections instead of subjecting oneself through harsh criticism when one falls short of the set ideals; recognizing failure as a part of a shared common human experience and not limited to one entity; and holding a non-judgmental and a receptive stance while carefully observing ones thoughts or feelings instead of getting overly identified with them, respectively (Neff & Germer, 2012).

Apart from changing nature of the problems and issues being faced, there has also been a change observed in the ways prescribed to manage or battle them successfully. These methods adopted have too evolved with their focus being deduced from curing the physical body to curing one's inner self. Yoga is one such science of inculcating Mindfulness, which has its roots embedded in the East with its branches extending all over the West. Yoga is defined as a spiritual practice advocating union of mind, body and soul with an ardent significance, thereby emanating powerful and everlasting effects (Iyengar, 2002). With an origin dating back to the Pre-Vedic period, this science has undergone parallel developments in the Eastern and Western cultures, and constitutes a major part in the Religious schools of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. This profound Science incorporates a range of techniques such as Meditation, Postural Exercises or Asanas, Breathing Practices and Mindfulness Training for inculcating deep-rooted effects in both physical and personal well-being (Iyengar, 2002). Although, Yoga is much more than just a methodology for stress-reduction, it is arguably considered the most comprehensive approach to counter stress, bringing about Mindfulness and in acquiring a sense of Self-Compassion. Research over the years has further suggested positive affects of Yoga, leading to holistic development of individuals in all age groups, with younger age groups being more agile in contrast to the older ones.

This review is an attempt to explore the effects of incorporating Yoga in Schools to improve Adolescents' Self-Compassion apart from striving for other proven benefits like strengthening interpersonal relations and intrapersonal relations (*Wisner & Starzec, 2015*), confidence building, enhancing academic performance, discipline, leadership abilities, improving cognition, fighting feelings of hostility and other physiological changes. It aims to bring about solace among students who are unable to manage their uncontrollable influx of self-demeaning and self-critical ideas when faced with poor academic performance or when they're unable to meet their set ideals. Doing so would make not only theirs, but also their parents' and teachers' experience and journey of education, a more positive one. Comprehending failure, whether in academic or in personal life and treating it as being an inevitable part of life and with breaking its stereotypical marriage with prejudice will give this generation a morale boost and a hope to have a stronger sense of self. It would help them in shaping into more realistic and grounded beings without an inflated idea of being somebody they are not. This emotional upliftment, however, needs to be initiated by the school authorities.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The construct of Self-Compassion with respect to adolescents saw a progressive trend over the last decade, addressing all the common issues faced by them in school and how to facilitate positive schooling. It began with studying self-compassion in relation with academic goals set by adolescents and their coping strategies when they fell short of their set ideals. Two studies by (*Neff, Hsieh, & Dejitterat, 2005*) examined the relationship between self-compassion, academic achievement goals, and coping with perceived academic failure among undergraduates with results indicating self-compassion to be positively associated with mastery goals and negatively associated with performance goals, with a mediating role played by the lesser fear of failure and greater perceived competence of self-compassionate individuals. The study further indicated self-compassion as being positively associated with emotion-focused coping strategies and negatively associated with avoidance-oriented strategies.

Gradually, there was growing interest in improving the overall well-being and psychological health of adolescents in relation with being self-compassionate considering which (*Neff, K.D., & McGehee, 2010*) examined self-compassion among adolescents, and further indicating a positive association of self-compassion with well-being and in predicting greater psychological health (*McGehee, 2010*), respectively.

Eventually, this construct was adopted by counseling therapists (*Vliet & Kalnins, 2011*) who reviewed Compassion-focused therapy (CFT), a form of cognitive behavioral therapy to help clients who were at risk of causing self-injury. It described strategies and techniques that had a compassion-focused approach to non-suicidal self-injury, targeting clients' attention, imagery, feeling, thinking, and behaviors.

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With growing interest in Meditative techniques (*Bergen-Cico & Cheon, 2013*) reinforced previous studies suggesting increases in mindfulness skills as mediating the effects of meditation on mental health outcomes. Their study examined the potential mediating effects of mindfulness and self-compassion on trait anxiety resulting in association of both self-compassion and mindfulness with reductions in anxiety, and cultivation of mindfulness as having the most robust mediating effect on reductions in trait anxiety.

With rising problems relating with frequent emotional breakdowns among adolescents, in the same year a study by (*Bluth & Blanton, 2013*) explored pathways to adolescents' emotional well-being through Mindfulness and Self-Compassion, suggesting both mindfulness and self-compassion as functional mediators in the pathway to emotional well-being.

After years of debating on inclusion of Yoga practices in school premises, a qualitative assessment by (*Conboy, Noggle, Frey, Kudesia, & Khalsa, 2013*) was conducted for studying the effects of a yoga program in place of physical education for a semester, with positive results reported on kinesthetic awareness including greater respect for the body, enhanced self-image; psychological benefits including, stress reduction, effective management of negative emotions and optimism. With the only negative being reported of most males sensing peer pressure against practicing it.

Academic institutions started witnessing a rise in cases involving self-harm and suicide due to an inability to cope with poor academic performance or failure. This behavior jolted the academic fraternity and led to propagation of positive intervention techniques for building resilience. (*Emery, 2013*) in this review obtained a strong evidence in favor of secondary school students, with mindfulness enhancing their resilience by improving executive function and attention, and by reducing their levels of stress and anxiety. An emerging evidence stated mindfulness' role in enhancing self-awareness and psychological well-being, thereby proposing an integration of mindful awareness practices into the regular academic curriculum as a complement to metacognitive classroom practices.

Rampant following of the cinematic idols and efforts to imitate their image, in turn led to psychological issues like negative body image and disordered eating, found to be the pervasive problems among young girls in American society. The results of an investigation by (*Breinesa, Tooleb, Tub, & Chenb, 2014*) indicated, higher levels of reported appearance-related self-compassion, being related to lower levels of disordered eating reported, further indicating, participants response to a perceived body flaw in a self-compassionate way as ranging significantly lower in subsequent self-reported body shame and anticipated disordered eating.

Mindfulness has long been researched in all age groups leading to significantly positive results among participants. A similar research was conducted by (*Edwardsa, Adamsa, Waldoa,*

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Hadfielda, & Biegelb, 2014) to study the effects of a Mindfulness Group on Adolescents, examining the levels of mindfulness groups on Perceived Stress, Mindfulness, Self-Compassion, and Psychological Symptoms of middle school students. The findings resulted with no significant changes during the baseline period, with significantly increased mindfulness and self-compassion, and significantly decreased perceived stress and depression with continued participation in the groups.

With an increased awareness and practice of mindfulness-based interventions and their positive affects (*Newby, 2014*) exerted efforts in investigating the effects of Yoga with Meditation (YWM), on self-criticism, self-compassion, and mindfulness in a graduate student population, reporting significantly decreased levels of self-criticism, and an increase in levels of self-compassion and mindfulness after participating in weekly yoga and meditation classes over the course of a two-month time period.

Procrastination as a state or trait exists in adolescents who range low on self-compassion, self-confidence, self-esteem, self-motivation and self-efficacy. Their constant habit of prolonging their action towards completion of a task creates a lot of stress as they strive for perfection and social validation in the results of their actions. To explore the relationship of procrastination and stress better, this very interesting meta-analytic investigation was conducted by (*Sirois, 2014*) to study the role of Self-Compassion as a mediator in the relationship between Trait Procrastination and Stress, which resulted in trait procrastination as being associated with lower levels of self-compassion and higher levels of stress. Further results revealed a moderate negative association of procrastination with self-compassion and self-compassion mediating the relationship between stress and procrastination.

A tremendous amount of awareness has been generated by academic and media fraternity in exploring the mind-body-spiritual techniques and how they are affecting different age groups. Amongst adolescents, a lot of work has been and is being done to increase their productivity in schools and to make their journey a positive one. The world can be seen falling back on the natural means of acquiring good health with resistance to the newer technologies. With an objective to investigate participation in yoga classes among school going children (*Singh & Mishra, 2014*) conducted this research to study yoga as a means to achieve physical fitness, mental fitness and emotional fitness of daily life, with yoga and mindfulness training being exemplary of less traditional methods being explored to help children manage their stress levels caused by academic performance, discipline, attendance and students' attitudes about themselves at the school.

Physical activity of any kind when done for a considerable amount of time, results in better health. Similarly, Yoga when combined with a series of other physical exercises in the right way can heighten the health and productivity of adolescents. In light of the same, (*Shimpi, Shetye, &*

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Mehta, 2014) in their research hypothesized a combination of Suryanamaskar training with general physical education exercises as offering higher benefits in improving health and performance related Physical fitness parameters in Adolescents between 13-15 years, resulting in enhanced physical fitness, a stronger immunity and reduced risks of non-communicable & communicable diseases.

The year of 2015 saw some more systematic reviews conducted upon the effects of school-based mindfulness interventions leading to positive psychological outcomes like resilience to stress and improved cognitive performance (*Zenner, Herrnleben-Kurz, & Walach*, 2014), with improvement on the level of self-adjustment of adolescents following a three months yoga regime (*Bhardwaj, Mookherjee, & Bhardwaj*, 2015), along with enhancing focus, perseverance, and relationships involving non-academic aspects of learning (*Finnan*, 2015).

The age of adolescence comes with a bundle of hormonal changes which can lead to frequent mood swings, spells of anger or aggression, fatigue or even depression in the emotionally weak ones, which are now being addressed by academic institutions. (*Felver, Butzer, Olson, Smith, & Khalsa*, 2015) in a study purported to directly compare the acute effects of participating in a single yoga class versus a single standard physical education (PE) class on affect and mood of students, the results of which revealed significantly greater decreases in anger, depression, and fatigue from before to after participating in yoga compared to PE, with further significant reductions in negative affect occurring after yoga but not after PE. In addition to which, participants after participating in both yoga and PE, reported significant decreases in confusion and tension.

In a review conducted by (*Rawlett & Scrandis*, 2015) studies on mindfulness based programs used with adolescents at-risk for poor future outcomes such as not graduating from high school and living in poverty were taken for examination, concluding of there being a relationship between health behaviors and academic achievement.

In a qualitative study (*Hjeltnes, Binder, Christian Moltu, & Dundas*, 2015) aimed to investigate the subjective experiences of university adolescents in an 8-week mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) program and its effect on academic evaluation anxiety. Results revealed five themes as a result of their active participation: (1) finding an inner source of calm, (2) sharing a human struggle, (3) staying focused in learning situations, (4) moving from fear to curiosity in academic learning, and (5) feeling more self-acceptance when facing difficult situations. These findings can however be generalized to the adolescents in a school setting with not a considerable age difference. A similar investigation was undertaken by (*Reddy & Kumari*, 2015) examining the effectiveness of short term, 10 days yoga intervention programme on cognitive function and attitude towards violence in school children with results indicating the yoga

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intervention as a significant contributor in cognitive functioning, with no significant results in ATV (attitude towards violence).

Social Anxiety Disorder is a dysfunction caused due to many reasons, with some being, low levels of self-esteem, low self-confidence, fear of being criticized or socially excluded or striving for perfection. A large percentage of adolescents nowadays are suffering with this disorder which inhibits them by making social situations challenging for them. Self-Compassion is a construct or a perspective which helps one to neutralize demeaning thoughts and boosts the confidence within by generalizing inferiority to humanity at large. For having a better understanding (Thake, 2015) purported to assess whether a mindfulness-based intervention (MBI) adapted for social anxiety disorder (SAD) could lead to an increase in self-compassion and trait mindfulness, and whether these increases mediated change in severity of SAD symptoms. The study revealed MBI-SAD as resulting in higher self-compassion and trait mindfulness and lower levels of social anxiety. Practice of Yoga or other mindfulness based interventions have resulted in effective and efficient management of anxiety disorders among youth with drastic reductions in some cases ranging between 3-18 years of age (Weaver & Darragh, 2015).

Schools have started propagating mindfulness interventions amongst students especially adolescents being at a tender age of transition to inculcate a constant sense of awareness and consciousness in every action they perform. They have done so, so as to facilitate healthier decision making and in generating more developed beings into the society. (Wisner & Starzec, 2015) in this qualitative study examined the pre and post experiences of alternative school students after their participation in a mindfulness skills program comprising of breath awareness, meditation while sitting, walking and lying. Results after data analysis yielded two broad areas of perceived benefits of participation in the mindfulness skills program: intrapersonal benefits including themes of self-awareness and self-regulation (incorporating cognition, emotions and behavior) and interpersonal benefits including themes of strengthening relationships (with family, peers and teachers).

METHODS

A total of 30 reviews were collected from researches done so far ranging between 2005-2015. Material was drawn from various sources like Jstor, Online University Press', articles from Journals, with a major chunk being drawn from Google Scholar. Most of the reviews resulted in positive outcomes of incorporating the Mindfulness Based Intervention of Yoga on adolescents in schools, leading to positive schooling.

INTERPRETATION

"The Best Days of Life" is how people generally describe their schooling experience. A journey with milestones to be achieved involving all the necessary aspects needed for an overall development and well being. The experiences lived in school transcends its boundaries and

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extend into adulthood and eventually old age. It's the most crucial part of the timeline where a child steps into the social world and apart from gaining subject specific knowledge, also acquires a wide array of skills which are essential prerequisites for personality development. Within its premises a child gets to interact socially, make friends for life, learn to make role models, become leaders, make societal contributions and become fully functional beings (*Rogers, 1965*), to name a few. Schooling is a two-way process where the teachers impart knowledge to students and the students in turn reciprocate by becoming socially capitalized (*Putnam, 1996*).

Rising demands to become a social fit has made this subtle learning process a burden on majority of the students. This work is an orchestration to study Yoga as a Predictor of Self-Compassion in Adolescents. It aims to delve deeper into the understanding of how and why there is a need to incorporate mind body engaging practices in schools for better growth and development. Adolescence is a tender age of transition where a child is in a space between teenage and early adulthood. It is characterized with multiple transitions biologically, physically, mentally and socially. They are witnessed with a sudden upsurge of expectations to perform in school so as to have a brighter future. This, in turn, creates bundles of stress academically as well as personally which is managed well by some and not by others. This study focuses on those who are emotionally ill equipped and easily get consumed by feelings of inadequacy in the face of stress. It aims at inculcating feelings of Self-Compassion amongst adolescents so as to give them the courage to face their shortcomings boldly and accept their imperfections without being critical about them for greater psychological health (*McGehee, 2010*) and better wellbeing (*Neff, K.D., & McGehee, 2010*). According to research, other aspects highlighting the need to be self-compassionate include better emotional wellbeing through being mindful (*Bluth & Blanton, 2013*), increased kinesthetic awareness, stress reduction and enhanced self-image (*Conboy, Noggle, Frey, Kudesia, & Khalsa, 2013*).

Another major objective being addressed here is the acceptance of mediocrity. Being average or below average has been seen only in the light of poor performance in schools. It is essential for schools to understand the varying capabilities of every student. Constant comparison on an interpersonal level between students only damages their sense of self and gives rise to competition. Low academic performance can be disturbing for high achievers and can pull them down to the dumps with an inability to cope with it. Providing them with adequate support in times of failure and picturing it as an inevitable part of life can be a great way to build their resilience. Resilience building has received significant importance amongst all age groups with rising stress to perform. Active involvement in mind-body engagement practices has emerged to be very effective as an intervention towards it. (*Emery, 2013*) in his review obtained a strong evidence that for secondary school students, mindfulness enhances their resilience by improving executive function and attention, and reduces their levels of stress and anxiety. An emerging evidence stated mindfulness' role in enhancing self-awareness and psychological well-being.

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The need of the hour is to teach them how to be satisfied with themselves and their capabilities, and to channelize their latent energy into something that they will excel at. An equal amount of importance needs to be given to the non-academic aspects of learning nowadays as children of this generation have the privilege and access to abundant professional career opportunities involving art or even physical activities. A state of equilibrium between academics and non-academic activities will lead to a more positive and better learning both on physical and psychological levels. In a recent research (*Finnan, 2015*) took into consideration one school that was willing to schedule time for students and teachers to engage in yoga practice together, concluding that valuable learning occurred during practice of yoga which got carried over into the academic classroom, highlighting some important non-academic aspects of learning that took place, namely, development of focus, perseverance, and positive relationships.

In order to facilitate this change in adolescents, more and more academic institutions are resorting to incorporating mind body engagement exercises in the curriculum apart from the usual physical education. One such practice includes Yoga. It has been found to bring about positive effects on a gross level. Benefits of practicing Yoga in schools include increased mindfulness which in turn improved self-awareness and self-regulation (incorporating cognition, emotions and behavior) and interpersonal benefits including themes of strengthening relationships (with family, peers and teachers), (*Wisner & Starzec, 2015*).

A very crucial aspect which is readily triggered by the academic institutions within a child is Anxiety. It is amongst the most lethal state and trait to encounter or bear, respectively. The sensitivity of anxiety is such that once triggered, it could manifest itself into any form ranging from fear to phobia or even a severe pathological condition. The method of communication to put across a message to students, whether pertaining to academic performance or extracurricular participation, needs critical care as negligence in doing so could lead to damage. Having done so, nowadays, there has been an increase in the number of cases pertaining to Anxiety Disorders. Anxiety is a byproduct of stress and comes as a trait in some. Primary reasons for which majorly include the domestic upbringing. However, since school is someplace a child spends more than half a day, it should be taken as a responsibility to reverse the process rather than igniting it. Yoga serves to be one such method which has resulted in efficient reduction in anxiety. (*Weaver & Darragh, 2015*) in their growing interest in intervention options for anxiety examined the review base (1990–2014) for yoga interventions addressing anxiety among children and adolescents between the age range of 3–18 years, concluding reduced anxiety after a yoga intervention.

Every institution involving human engagement must pledge to make the experience for the individual a positively impactful one. Academic institutions in order to make schooling a positive experience must function with an aim to break the prevailing prejudices and stereotypical ideas and move towards equipping students with peaceful minds and the required

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skill set for survival. Doing so would yield unconditional returns to both society as well as humanity as a whole. In a study conducted by (Hjeltnes, Binder, Christian Moltu, & Dundas, 2015) the subjective experiences of students who participated in an 8-week mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) program for academic evaluation anxiety were investigated, with five emerging themes: (1) finding an inner source of calm, (2) sharing a human struggle, (3) staying focused in learning situations, (4) moving from fear to curiosity in academic learning, and (5) feeling more self-acceptance when facing difficult situations.

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