



Mat to Clinic: A Systematic Review on Role of Therapeutic Yoga in Clinical Management of Mental Disorders and Wellbeing Promotion in Integrative Health Care

Randika Perera

Gampaha Wickramarachchi University of Indigenous Medicine, Sri Lanka

Email address of the corresponding author - randika@gwu.ac.lk

Abstract

Therapeutic psychology has been directed towards utilizing a synthesized approach of the Western and Eastern principles of health and healing with the emerging discipline of integrative care to adapt the potentials of holistic care relapse prevention, and promotion of a healthy lifestyle. Integrative care has introduced several therapeutic approaches and one of the prominent mind-body interventions was yoga therapy or therapeutic yoga. Yoga is a practice that has developed with the practice of physical posture (*asana*), breathing experience (*pranayama*), and meditation (*dhyana*), which provided the foundation for contemporary yoga therapy. Globally, both researchers and clinicians in mental health have utilized this approach to treat common mental health disorders and indicate significant outcomes related to the effective management of mental disorders such as depression, bipolar affective disorder, anxiety schizophrenia, and so on. In addition, yoga therapy was effective in the management of stress or the causes of mental disorders. Therefore, this study evidentially shows the contribution of yoga in the management of common mental disorders and the tool of prevention in future mental health care.

Keywords: Holistic Health; Integrative Care; Mental Disorders; Wellness; Yoga Therapy

Introduction

Health has been transformed into holistic health today; thus, dimensions of health are physical, mental, social, emotional, and spiritual. The adequate view of the traditional concept of health has generated a negative influence on holistic health development, such as neglecting the overall values of human health, adequate holistic care, and effective prevention. To fulfill this gap and give recognition for the dimension of mind, body and soul in human personality and integrate the Eastern healing approaches, the ideological concept of holistic health originated. The medium of healing in holistic health is known as psychoneuroimmunology. Considering the connection between the mind and body and its influence on the function of the central nervous system and the immune system has been the foundation of holistic health interventions. The studies related to this notion have been able to scientifically prove that as a result of mind-body interventions are able to alter the immune responses. Consequently, able to influence the hypothalamus and produce a positive immune response, which helps to biological change in the brain and body and contributes to suppressing stress hormones such as adrenaline and cortisol through the chemical changes that occur in the immune system and promote wellness (Lewis, 2002). According to the psychological teachings, a major cause that leads individuals towards both chronic and

mental disorders can be recognized as stress. This directs a special concern to the association between mental disorders and stress. The literature highlights that when an individual is exposed to stressful life conditions, the continuation of acute stress long-term causes the propagation of psychopathologies. The impact of stress makes several changes in human biological chemistry and leads to deficits in thoughts and behaviors due to the stressors. The result of all these conditions could lead individuals towards mental disorders. Under the combination of psychiatry and clinical psychology, such pathological mental health conditions are currently managed. However, the efficacy of the intervention is questionable, because after a client recovers from a mental disorder the probability of relapsing is a serious matter (Fink, 2010).

The application of holistic health in the real world is occupied by the application called integrative care. Under integrative care, the treatment approaches that are utilized for the treatment and prevention can be recognized as complementary and alternative therapies or CAM therapies. The foundation of these therapies is the above-mentioned mind-body connection which strengthens psychoneuroimmunology. In contemporary mental health care services, both researchers and clinicians are focused on utilizing the CAM intervention for the management of mental disorders. Western interventions are able to manage the biological causes of mental disorders and are inadequate in managing stress and leading the client to prevention. However, the intervention mechanism utilized in integrative health care has the potential to manage the stressful condition of the individual and build a positive way to overcome relapse. Therefore, through observing the various interventional approaches, contemporary clinicians and researchers have synthesized and utilized them for the development of the holistic health of individuals to overcome the stress associated with mental disorders for effective recovery (Micozzi, 2018).

One of the major approaches in integrative health care is therapeutic yoga. Yoga is a spiritual practice which has been formulated in the Indian continent 5000 years ago. The ancient literature of yoga has highlighted the teachings related to the mind-body connection and mental health. Further, yoga has introduced several methods to build the union of the mind and body and manage stress in the therapeutic aspects. The major therapeutic applications of yoga have been known as physical posture (*asana*), breathing practice (*pranayama*), and meditation (*dhyana*). In addition, yoga encompasses various therapeutic tools. These yoga therapeutic applications are currently utilized to effectively manage mental disorders by promoting holistic health care and relapse prevention to manage stress (Horovitz & Elgelid, 2015).

Therefore, considering the significance of the therapeutic yoga approach, this study evaluates the clinical effectiveness of yoga in the management of common mental health disorders and the scientific validity of the yoga practice towards wellness promotion as a relapse prevention mechanism. The current study evaluates the application of yoga therapy for treating and preventing mental disorders, focuses on effectiveness of the yoga therapy for the management of common mental disorders, yogic approaches utilized in treating mental disorders, the impact of each yoga treatment instrument on the efficacy of the intervention, effectiveness of the yoga therapy for the relapse prevention and the utility of the yoga for the cope with stress and wellness promotion within the findings of the existing literature. In addition, further evolution of yoga therapy, recognizing the limitations and future direction also explored. Thus, this study has provided an in-depth exploration of the clinical effectiveness of therapeutic yoga in managing common mental health disorders, promoting wellness and using it in counseling and psychotherapy.

Materials and Methods

This study was performed according to the PRISMA guideline for systematic literature review. The eligibility criteria for selecting studies were that the respective study needs to be a systematic review, and each case in the studies should be done as a randomized control trial. Participants were patients who were clinically diagnosed with the DSM-IV or V criteria, and they had mental disorders without any other comorbid conditions or other chronic or mental disorders. The intervention approach of yoga can be utilized as a single approach of yoga or combined approaches of yoga or psychotherapy. A clear intervention of any yogic approach needs to be present. The studies which did not meet the above criteria have been excluded. The search has been done using the indexed databases with the number of results of Pub Med (124), Scopus (90), and Cochrane Library (140). The search terms were yoga or yoga therapy for depression, bipolar affective disorder, schizophrenia, anxiety, substance use disorder, anxiety, and stress. The period of the search was 2014 to 2024. In exclusion 201 duplicated results have been removed. Through screening the title and abstract 153 studies were included, and 31 studies were eligible. After reading the full text, 11 studies were included in the review. The risk of bias is avoided by focusing on randomized control trials registered with clinical trial registries. The analysis method used was subgroup analysis. Afterward, an aggregative review was done according to the thematic synthesis on the theme of therapeutic yoga interventions utilized for mental disorders, the outcome of the interventions, limitations, and the future direction of therapeutic yoga as an integrative health care approach.

Result and Discussion

One of the most common mental health disorders is major depressive disorder and according to the statistics, 25% of women and 12% of men during their lifetime experience the risk of becoming victims of major depressive disorders. The clinical features

of major depressive disorder are represented by the elements of the physical, psychological, and social. The most common feature of major depressive disorders is individuals experience hopelessness, lower self-esteem, and less motivation to perform daily activities. On some occasions, these conditions may lead to suicidal action. Allopathic medicine majorly uses drug intervention for the management of depression. Under integrative care, yoga has been utilized for the management of several groups of depression patients as a combined approach. These patient groups represent both male and female patients. Yogic posture (*asana*), Breathing Exercise (*pranayama*), *Sudarshan kriya*, and Hatha Yoga practice have been occupied. While providing the antidepressant medications, these yogic interventions were delivered as supportive therapies. While focusing on the outcome of the studies, it clearly shows that short-term utilization of yoga provides an effective influence towards recovery. However, combining many approaches of yoga provides more adverse effects on the therapeutic outcome. The review study on yoga therapy for depression concludes that yoga is effective in treating depression as an adjunct intervention (Cramer et.al, 2017). Another study that has utilized yoga therapy interventions with the critical conditions of depression such as suicidal attempts and recurring depression also indicated that yogic therapeutic approaches of breath control (*pranayama*), Meditation (*dhyana*), Yogic lifestyle, Iyengar Yoga, Hatha yoga, personalized yoga, breathing meditation, mindfulness, *Sudarshan Kriya*, *Sahaja Yoga*, *Ashtanga Yoga*, *Yoga Nidra*, Laughter yoga have the efficacy on reducing depression symptoms by 50% through the improvement of the lifestyle. Further, another significant feature was that this outcome was produced by combining yoga with psychotherapy and pharmaceutical interventions (WU et.al, 2023).

Bipolar disorder is an extension of depressive disorders that presents depression and mania episodically. As a common health disorder, bipolar affective disorder may show changes in mood and actions

with the symptoms of grandiosity, excessive talk, racing thoughts, uncontrollable moods and actions, irritated mood, lack of interest, and less motivation and care. Under critical conditions, individuals can be led to suicidal actions. The management of bipolar affective disorder is a lifelong process. Interventions such as pharmacology, psychotherapy, psycho-social education, and healthy habits are introduced for the individual; recently, researchers and clinicians have directed attention to utilizing yoga therapy for the management of bipolar affective disorder. According to the literature, it is apparent that the intervention of hatha yoga has been effective in the management of bipolar disorder. However, it has not indicated positive outcomes for all patients. Therefore, the management of bipolar disorder with yoga shows mixed outcomes in the treatment efficacy (Jean et.al, 2022).

However, the efficacy of managing anxiety-related disorders with yoga therapy has shown effective outcomes in treating various types of anxiety disorders. The anxiety disorders treated with yoga therapy are obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Conditions of OCD such as recurrent thoughts and actions, PTSD flashbacks of the traumatic experience, and physiological and psychological negativities could be managed through integrative yoga therapeutic instruments: yoga posture (*asana*), sequence yoga (*vinyasa*), breath control (*pranayama*), meditation, and deep relaxation. The intervention has been delivered in three approaches: single-approach interventions, combined yogic approaches, and combination with psychotherapy. The effectiveness of yoga therapy for anxiety disorder is highlighted as the short-term yoga interventions have been more effective in developing self-efficacy, and self-coping abilities. Yoga is therefore recommended as a safe intervention for anxiety (Cramer et.al, 2018). Another specific study on yogic intervention for PTSD in women has highlighted that yoga has decreased the symptoms significantly (Ali et.al, 2023).

The efficacy of the yogic intervention has been tested in managing psychotic disorders of Schizophrenia. Clinical features of schizophrenia show positive and negative symptoms that indicate decrease in function, abilities, or behavior and abnormal thoughts the perceptions. The treatment intervention for managing schizophrenia majorly involves psychotic medication. Combining yogic approaches of breathing (*pranayama*), body posture (*asana*), and yoga relaxation (*yoga nidra*) has been effective in the management of schizophrenia. The short-term interventions give positive outcomes and indicate a significant reduction of the positive and negative symptoms. Under the rehabilitation process, positive social interaction and improvement in quality of life have been shown as the outcome of the study (Yin et al., 2024).

A negative reaction to stressful conditions can be recognized as a substance abuse disorder. The harmful use of a drug or cluster of cognitive, behavioral, and physiologic symptoms indicates that the individual continues the use of the substance, despite a significant substance use-related disorder. This behavior can lead individuals toward many negative and violent behaviors. For the management of such conditions, the combination of yoga, Hatha yoga, *sudarshan kriya*, breathing yoga (*pranayama*), meditation (*dhyana*), *vinayasa yoga*, *Iyengar Yoga*, and combination of pranayama with CBT were utilized. The reduction of the craving was a significant outcome achieved through yoga intervention (Walia et.al, 2021). Another study which is specific to women patients has indicated that yoga reduces stress and craving and is effective in relief urges with short-term interventions (Brooks et.al, 2020).

In addition, researchers and clinicians have evaluated the efficacy of yoga therapy for the management of the mental health disorders of special populations such as prenatal depression and anxiety and depression of children and adolescents. During the management of prenatal depression, the integrative yoga approach included a combination of breathing

and meditation. The result indicated a significant reduction in depressive symptoms (Gong et al., 2015). For the management of children and adolescent anxiety and depression, physical posture (*asana*), breathing (*pranayama*), meditation (*dhyana*), chanting, and yoga games (*yoga krida*) have been utilized. The outcome was a high level of reduction in the symptoms of anxiety and depression and changes in children's behavior. Further, the practice of yogic posture has indicated high-level of reduction in anxiety (James et.al, 2020).

The major cause for all these mental health disorders was improper management of stress. After recovery, there is a risk of recurring mental disorders due to the improper management of the stress. Therefore, to effectively recover, proper management of stress is essential. This potential exists in yoga and studies have highlighted this efficacy in stress management. Yoga includes three major therapeutic approaches: physical posture (*asana*), breathing (*pranayama*), and meditation (*dhyana*); hence, it has the ability to control the physiological and psychological foundations of stress and controls the stress reactivity (Mandlik et.al, 2023).

The limitations mentioned in available literature related to the yogic management of mental disorders were duration-related issues such as short-term intervention, use of small sample sizes, ineffective intervention approaches, limitation of using some of the yoga approaches, disorder-oriented yoga treatment approaches, and evaluation of the long-term efficacy of yoga. The use of larger samples for future research has been significantly highlighted in the existing literature (Cramer et.al, 2017; WU et.al, 2023; Ali et.al, 2023; Yin et.al, 2024; Mandlik et.al, 2023).

Conclusion

Contemporary integrative health care provides a significant contribution to effectively managing both chronic and mental disorders. This study

has evaluated the level of one of the integrative care intervention approaches of yoga therapy in the productive management of mental disorders. Individual inability to cope with stress leads to emerging mental disorders. Thus, mental disorders need to be treated with both pharmacological and psychotherapeutic intervention, in some cases this combination does not provide a positive outcome on the management of the mental disorders. However, the utilization of yoga therapy for the management of common mental disorders was effective. Therefore, yoga's therapeutic approaches of physical posture (*asana*), breathing experiences (*pranayama*), and meditation (*dhyana*) and sub approaches of yoga have been shown to significantly contribute towards the effective management of the common mental disorders of depression, bipolar affective disorders, anxiety disorder, schizophrenia, substance use disorders, prenatal depression, child and adolescent anxiety. In addition, under relapse prevention introducing a therapeutically effective way toward the management of stress is essential, and literature highlights that yoga has such potential. Thus, therapeutic yoga utilizes integrative care and makes a significant contribution towards the effective management of mental disorders, and wellness promotion as a preventive mechanism. Future studies may focus on maximizing the sample size by utilizing yoga in a disorder-specific way and promoting yoga among the psychologically challenged population will become a more effective intervention to experience mental well-being.

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