

	Think India (Quarterly Journal) ISSN: 0971-1260 Vol-23, Special Issue-03 in collaboration with Indira Gandhi Government Girls Degree College, Rae Bareli, -229001, Uttar Pradesh, India Sponsored by Dept. of Higher Education , Govt. of U.P.	
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NATIONAL SEMINAR ON YOGA FOR WELLNESS AND POSITIVE HEALTH
14th - 15th December, 2019 (Saturday-Sunday)

Exploring the Effectiveness of Yoga at Workplace: An Overview of Research

Dr. Akancha Srivastava
Assistant Professor
Dept. of Psychology
CHRIST (Deemed to be University)
Delhi-NCR
akancha.srivastava@christuniversity.in

Abstract

With the coming up of globalization, the environmental conditions have changed. It has led to change in structure, technology and people. Recent technologies have not only made the world a smaller place, but they have transformed the nature of work. The unpredictable turbulent environment has made workplaces much more complex and difficult to adapt. These prevailing conditions at workplace have imposed major wellbeing and health challenges for employees at organizations. After realizing the human cost organizations are trying their best to have the most valued workforce, as healthy and happy employees will create positive organizations. Nourishing employee's health is a primary responsibility of organizations. According to WHO (1948), "Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." Owing to this organizations have comprehended the fact that a global and comprehensive health care approach is the need of the hour. In order to restore employee's health, organizations have realized the importance of providing mind-body relaxation. Organizations are relying on Yoga as a practical tool for enhancing and maintaining employee's physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health. This paper is an attempt to explore the efficacy of yoga at workplace.

Keywords: Yoga, Health, Wellbeing, Workplace, Organization

Introduction

The most important asset which organizations today have is the “People” component. People is one factor that cannot be duplicated or imitated by the competitors and is considered the most valuable asset if managed and engaged properly, J .Anitha (2013). In his 1954 seminal book, *The Practice of Management*, Drucker stressed the unique value of human resources for their individual involvement to an organization. He advocates that we must understand and realize individual characteristics if we are to treat employees as human beings who contribute to the organization through their talent. Among the many factors that influence work conditions, employee health, seems to take the key position affecting work environment. Globalization is a key antecedent of working environments (Idris, Dollard, & Winefield, 2011). With the coming up of globalization, the environmental conditions have changed. It has led to change in structure, technology as well as people. The influences of cultural factors in this complex system level integrated markets, international trade, international investment, multinational corporations; technology convergence is a major significance (Cojocaru, 2011). Globalization lifted the mix of cultures, languages, viewpoints, as well as the number of expatriate (Friedman, 2007). This change has casted its impact on organizational culture. Recent technologies have not only made the world a smaller place, but they have transformed the nature of work . It has led to change in structure, technology and people..The unpredictable turbulent environment has made workplaces much more complex and difficult to adapt. These prevailing conditions at workplace have imposed major wellbeing and health challenges for employees at organizations. On this perspective, (Cartwright and Holmes, 2006, p.2017) remarks that, “As individuals become increasingly disenchanted and disillusioned with work and fatigued by the constant demand to change and to be flexible in response to organizational needs, employers now need to actively restore the balance, recognize the meaning and emotional aspects of work and move towards creating a more energized, fulfilled and engaged workforce.” However after realizing the human cost, organizations are trying their best to have the most valued workforce. Restoring employees’ health is one of the primary responsibilities of any organization. Organizations are leaving no stones unturned to maximize the health and wellbeing of their employees.

Pressing Demands of Organizations: Theoretical Perspective

Increasing workload has altered the picture of organizations today. Optum conducted a study and found that 46% of the workforce in organisations in India suffers from some or the other form of stress, 43% of the employees had skewed body mass index, of which 30% with diabetic risk, 30% with hypertension risk and 46% high on stress (Bhattacharya & Vijayraghvan2016).

Employees due to pressing deadlines and pressure to prove themselves are experiencing burnout instead of engagement. Maslach and Leiter (2008) defined burnout as “a psychological syndrome of exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy, which is experienced in response to chronic job stressors burnout is an erosion of engagement, and, thus, burnout and engagement represent opposite ends of a same continuum. Maslach and Leiter argued that the three dimensions of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) measure burnout as well as employee engagement. The first MBI dimension, emotional exhaustion, is characterized by feelings of being emotionally overextended and worn out with work. When exhausted, individuals feel physically fatigued, used up, and unable to unwind and recover. Cynicism (alternatively known as depersonalization) refers to negative, callous, or excessively distant attitudes toward co-workers and one’s job. It is marked by heightened pessimism and a tendency to abandon tasks. The final MBI dimension, labelled either ineffectiveness or inefficacy, covers feelings of personal failure, incompetence, and lack of achievement in one’s work. As operationalized by Maslach and Leiter, when individuals experience burnout, energy turns into emotional exhaustion, involvement turns into cynicism, and efficacy turns into inefficacy (Maslach &Leiter, 1997).

Bakker et al., 2003, Demerouti et al., 2001 is based on the assumption that every job may have its own specific risk factors associated with job stress, these factors can be classified in two general categories (i.e. job demands and job resources).They defined job demand as those physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job that require sustained physical and/or psychological (cognitive and emotional) effort or skills and are therefore associated with certain physiological and/or psychological costs. Job resources refer to those physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job that are either/or: functional in achieving work goals, reduce job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs; stimulate personal growth, learning, and development. Due to increasing job demand employees are experiencing various physiological and psychological cost.

Yoga : A Tool for Health Enhancement

Ministry of Ayush (2016) defines Yoga as a “discipline to improve or develop one’s inherent power in a balanced manner. It offers the means to attain complete self-realization. The literal meaning of the Sanskrit word Yoga is ‘Yoke’. Yoga can therefore be defined as a means of uniting the individual spirit with the universal spirit of God. According to Maharishi Patanjali, Yoga is the suppression of modifications of the mind”.

[Govindaraj](#), [Karmani](#), Varambally and Gangadhar (2016) “Yoga is a multifaceted spiritual tool with enhanced health and well-being as one of its positive effects. The components of yoga which are very commonly applied for health benefits are asanas (physical postures), pranayama (regulated breathing) and meditation.” There are various research evidences which justifies the link between Yoga and physical and mental wellbeing of an individual (Kasiganesan, et al., 2004) Yoga helps individual to understand, interpret and regulate the emotions in a better way so it can be the gateway to a stress-free life. Due to the busy lifestyle and with the existence of modern health management tools the glory of Yoga declined for some time. Owing to increasing complexities of modern lifestyle and sedentary habits, health related issues have emerged which is another form of stress.

After a period of stagnation the practice of yoga has once again stirred the world with the motivation and passion to be fit and healthy. It is an inevitable fact today’s world is characterised by fast paced technology, commercialization, cut throat completion. This has made lifestyle sedentary which subsequently has resulted into stress and burnout.

Burnout has affected health conditions. In order to have enhanced health and stress free lifestyle, therapeutic yoga interventions are planned. According to Woodyard 2011, “Therapeutic yoga is defined as the application of yoga postures and practice to the treatment of health conditions and involves instruction in yogic practices and teachings to prevent reduce or alleviate structural, physiological, emotional and spiritual pain, suffering or limitations”. Shohani et al., 2018 have considered Yoga as a “complementary medicine” as it came to be effective in reducing stress anxiety and depression.

[Accessing the Effect of Yoga at Workplace](#)

Studies have shown various positive effects of Yoga. [Gururaja](#), [Harano](#), [Toyotake](#), and [Kobayashi](#) (2010). Yoga stems from ancient Indian

scientific culture which facilitates in enhancing physical, mental, social and spiritual health. The origin of Yoga lies in the Indian heritage and culture. Yoga is practiced in harmony. It is considered as the most simple and flexible tool of health management. Yoga is considered to be amalgamation of holistic science and arts.

Dwivedi, Kumari, Akhilesh & Nagendra (2015) conducted a study on working professionals to examine the effect of mindfulness developed through *Yoga* practices on aggression and positive affectivity among involved in counterproductive work behaviour. The results indicated that *Yoga* group showed statistically significant ($P < 0.001$) reduction in aggression and significant ($P < 0.001$) enhancement in PA in comparison to the control group. Valencia et al., (2019) conducted a study to explore the effectiveness of yoga programmes at workplace. The results indicated that yoga has a positive effect on health in the workplace, particularly in reducing stress. Pradhan and Pradhan (2013) proposed a conceptual framework of karma yoga. Through their work they proposed that Karma-Yoga will be positively related to job involvement, job satisfaction & negatively related to intention to quit. Adhia, Nagendra and Mahadevan (2010) measured the effect of yoga way of life on five different indicators of organizations. The five indicators were job satisfaction, job involvement, goal orientation, affective organizational commitment and organizational citizenship behavior.

In the results it was found that Yoga has a significant positive impact on job satisfaction, goal orientation, affective organizational commitment and organizational citizenship behaviour. However job involvement did not show any improvement. Bhatt (2011) in his study assessed emotions in organizations with the help of PANAS scale and provided yoga sessions as interventions. The results revealed that yoga practise proved very effective in reducing negative emotions. The study corroborated the fact that week long yoga sessions should be planned for organizations as they are effective in reducing negative emotion. Acharya, Pradhan and Nagendra (2014) conducted a study to examine the stress management programme (Self Management of Excessive Tention. SMET) on ONGC mangers. The modules consisted of meditation, lectures, and discourse from Bhagwat Geeta. Pre and post design was incorporated and the results revealed that SMET practices were very impactful in transforming personality traits in managers. It was found that there was a reduction in anxiety, depression and somatisation and it enhanced their wellbeing. Yoga and meditation is a practice tool, and the

seven chakras keeps the individual vigorous and healthy (Priyal & Ramkumar, 2016). Ross and Thomas have provided a review of comparative study to assess the impact of yoga and exercise in both healthy and diseased populations. The results revealed that yoga is an impactful and better tool than exercise and it improved a variety of health-related outcome measures. Hartfiel, Burton, Rycroft-Malone, Clarke, Havenhand, Khalsa and., Bangor (2012) assessed the effectiveness of a yoga-based intervention for reducing perceived stress and back pain at work. Results indicated that a workplace yoga intervention can reduce perceived stress and back pain and improve psychological well-being. Hall (2009) corroborated the fact that yoga had beneficial effects in terms of managing stress through breathing techniques and increased self-awareness. The study indicated the major finding that yoga improved the individual's relationships with other members of the organization as well as improved the client/vendor relationships.

Practice of Yoga in Organizations

Studies have shown that healthy employees are committed to the organization, are engaged in creating meaning in their work and are willing to go the extra miles (Hoxsey, 2010). Organizations are now sensitive to the fact that employee's health has direct impact on the productivity and culture of the organization. According to WHO (1948), "Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." Organizations are investing resources, time and finances to maintain healthy and productive employees. After realising the cost of employee's health, organizations have started implementing the practice of yoga at workplace. Several big organizations have started implementing the practice of yoga at workplace. Various forms of meditations, Zumba, yoga, are being organized by organizations for boosting the health and wellbeing of their employees. Deshpande (2012) has provided the fact that yoga meditation and soothing humour are effective and relevant tools for stress management in organizations. For working professionals yoga could be an effective tool for health management. It is a soothing agent for stressed Indian corporate employees. The techniques of yoga comprise of physical postures (asanas), breath expansion and enhancement (pranayama), relaxation and meditation techniques (dhyaan). This inculcates the beliefs of simple and adoption of natural lifestyle. It enhances energy of the person and develops a positive attitude. It has been attested by many as a complete all-in one holistic formula for stress management. Thus, realizing the impact in many organizations when regular session of

yoga is conducted, according to their employees' requirement (Sharma , Chauhan & Khanna ,2012)

Twitter has taken up the initiation of holding boot camps and yoga class for enhancing employee's emotional health and wellbeing. Jones, 2017 stated in his review that yoga classes are one of the most desirable employee benefits which are provided by Google. Lamb (2016) stated that mindfulness as a technique is practiced and promoted by employees of Google and Twitter as it helps employees to deal with challenges far ahead and also to engage them in solving impossible problem. Owing to the fact that organizations are technology driven, fast paced, institutions which are marked by cut throat competitions companies like Indian railways, maruti Suzuki, Snapdeal have initiated for introducing yoga and Pranayam Asana among the employees (Verma, 2014).

The current overviews of researches have provided a diversified scenario of practising yoga at workplace. Evidence from the literature suggests that there are different forms of yoga research. Some of them are about yoga as therapeutic intervention, impact and effect of yoga and mindful as a technique , impact of meditation each targeting different aspects of workplace. An encouraging fact is that due to its therapeutic nature, yoga has emerged as a holistic, spiritual, mental and physical relaxation tool. At workplace yoga has benefitted various employees with diversified physicality and taken care of individual related health issues. The paper mentioned about various studies which have highlighted the efficacy of yoga at workplace. The paper discusses the context of organization and its various challenges. The changing nature of work has made employees exhausted, physically fatigued. It is marked by heightened pessimism and a tendency to abandon tasks. Similarly increasing job demands have resulted in physiological and/or psychological costs (Bakker et al., 2003, Demerouti et al., 2001.) To overcome the effect of mental and physical exhaustion yoga is being practiced as an intervention tool for health enhancement. The results of the studies have shown that yoga and other meditation techniques have provided beneficial evidences. Seeing the impact of yoga, many organizations have started introducing this as a technique for employee welfare and assistance. It can be concluded that the organizations are aware about their employees needs and welfare but still at workplace the practice of yoga has a long way to go. There are only few organizations who have organised proper sessions for health management. There is a need that the corporate world should realize

and sense health related issues of their employees. Doing so will support employees in being mentally, physically, psychologically and spiritually healthy. Healthy employees will help in developing and creating positive organizations at work. Positive organizations can generate exceptionally tremendous performance, both individually and collectively.

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