

“THE HOLISTIC JOURNEY OF YOGA IN MODERN SOCIETY”

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Abstract: Yoga is a comprehensive method of health care that takes into account mental, spiritual, and physical well-being. It originated in the prehistoric Indian civilization. It uses asanas, pranayama, and meditation to bring the body, mind, and soul together. With origins in Vedic culture, it is discussed in the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali. Yoga is a widely established practice that promotes resilience, stress reduction, and an enhanced quality of life in healthcare and education sectors worldwide. It is a helpful tool for managing chronic illnesses and improving general wellbeing because it can be used by people of all ages. Yoga blends ancient wisdom with contemporary needs to provide a path to harmony, self-discovery, and a transformational existence in the modern world.

Keywords : Yoga; Holistic approach; Asanas; Healthcare; Self-discovery; Stress reduction; Chronic illness; Mental health

I. INTRODUCTION

In the twenty-first century, problems including stress-related illnesses and societal instability are becoming more prevalent, even though medical discoveries are prolonging life expectancy. Medical experts are aware of the accept the shortcomings of traditional therapies and the significance of mental and spiritual wellness for general health. The World Health Organization actively works to advance spiritual, mental, and social well-being on a global scale. Numerous domains such as physical health, psychology, social connections, and the environment are among those where studies show that yoga improves quality of life.

Yoga promotes physical stamina, creativity, and emotional equilibrium, making it a useful tool for developing a person's whole personality. Using centuries-old wisdom developed by spiritual seekers, the incorporation of yoga into healthcare procedures represents a paradigm shift towards holistic approaches to health and wellness. Decreased stress and provision of support systems are two ways to foster student well-being, which is crucial for a healthy learning environment. In order to help students stay motivated and engaged, which will improve their academic accomplishment, mental health support services should be

given greater attention. Because yoga promotes physical and mental well-being as well as stress reduction, it is included in curricula in universities and schools to create a positive learning atmosphere.

1.1 ORIGIN OF YOGA

Yoga, originating over 5,000 years ago in ancient Indian civilization, finds its earliest evidencing the hymns and rituals of the Vedas, particularly the Rigveda. The National Institutes of Health has recognized yoga, a 3,000-year-old practice, as a holistic approach to health and has classed it as Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM). The Sanskrit word "yoga" comes from the word "union" or "yoke," which denotes the fusion of the body, mind, and soul. Consistent yoga practice builds resilience, strength, and virtues like self-control and compassion, which enhance peace of mind and overall wellbeing.

The Srimad Bhagavad Gita suggests Raja Yoga meditation as one technique for reducing stress and fostering spiritual growth. The king of yogas, Raja yoga, interprets meditation practices figuratively and incorporates deliberate contemplation of spiritual ideas. In Raja Yoga, for example, chanting mantras involves more than just repeating words; it involves reflecting thoroughly on their meaning in order to transform consciousness from body-awareness to soul-consciousness. As part of this meditation practice, you will learn to be mindful of your soul, establish a connection with the Divine, and practice mental calm and purity. Through Raja Yoga, practitioners develop awareness of material illusions and false ego, accumulate inner powers for pure actions (karma), and prepare for the transition from this world with clarity and certainty about the beyond. In essence, Raja Yoga offers a profound spiritual journey that frees individuals from fear, cultivates inner peace, and facilitates a harmonious connection with the Divine, ultimately guiding them towards enlightenment and liberation.

Around the 2nd century BCE, Patanjali's Yoga Sutras describes yoga as the mastery of the mind, emphasizing concentration and inner peace. It's a skillful science of action, facilitating relaxation and awareness. The sutras outline eight limbs of yoga, known as Ashtanga Yoga which includes ethical principles, physical postures, breath control, withdrawal of senses, concentration, meditation,



enlightenment and offers an organized method for mind development.

1.2 EIGHT LIMBS OF YOGA – PATANJALI'S YOGA SUTRA

The eight limbs provide a systematic approach to harmonizing the body, mind, and spirit. They offer practitioners a transformative journey towards self-discovery, inner peace, and enlightenment.

1. **Yama** which refers to the disciplines
2. **Niyama** which are the injunctions
3. **Asana** or physical posture
4. **Pranayama** which is the life energy (prana) under control
5. **Pratyahara** or removing one's senses from enjoyable objects
6. **Dharana** or mind-focusing
7. **Dhyana** focused attention
8. The superconscious state of **samadhi**

1.3 TYPES OF YOGA

1. **Karma yoga**: Acting with a detached attitude toward the results of one's actions is the first step in this practice. Man attains a state of mental steadiness or "Samatvam yoga uchyate" as a result of releasing himself from strong attachments. Action and comprehension tools (jnanendriyās and karmendriyās) are purified.
2. **Bhakti Yoga**: The key to walking the path of worship is emotional regulation. The emotional assaults that befall man in this modern environment hurl him around. By appropriately utilizing the energy involved, the path of Bhakti is beneficial for gaining control over emotional instability.
3. **Jnana Yoga** : Man is now a rational being thanks to science. It's almost time to become sharp mentally. Analysis is the instrument. The study of philosophy is a suitable career option for intelligent people since it focuses on the Upanadic contribution of analyzing "happiness." Numerous other fundamental inquiries concerning reality, the outside and internal universe, and the mind are also addressed. In order to get to the basic foundation of cognition, fundamental concerns are even posed about the intellect itself.
4. **Raja Yoga**: The secret to success in nearly all of life's pursuits is mental cultivation. The practice of mind culture yoga, also known as psychic control, is a useful and simple method for achieving higher realms of consciousness. Its foundation is the Austang Yoga of Patanjali's yoga system.
5. **Hatha Yoga**: According to the National Centre for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH), which defines Hatha yoga as the most popular style performed in the USA, meditation is an essential part of the practice in addition to physical postures, breathing

techniques, and philosophical aspects. It balances the body's energy system and clears energy channels.

1.4 DISCIPLINES OF YOGA

The disciplines of yoga aid in the development of a person's personality on five levels - mental, physical, intellectual and emotional while also advancing spiritually.

1. **Physical Level**: Yoga encourages an organ system and body that are in balance, flexible, and work harmoniously. It benefits athletes and physical performers by improving energy utilization and stamina.
2. **Mental Level**: Yoga attracts technologists, engineers, musicians, and artists by enhancing creativity and willpower. It develops fortitude, mental serenity, and the ability to turn challenges into possibilities.
3. **Emotional Level**: Yoga extends and sensitizes emotions, which helps with emotional management and lessens psychosomatic conditions. It provides an organized method for emotional growth.
4. **Cognitive Level**: Yoga emphasizes disengagement from intense focus while honing intelligence. Deep examination is made possible, but it also makes separation easier, allowing one to escape intellectual slavery.
5. **Spiritual Basis**: Yoga encourages self-exploration and an interior path toward spirituality. It fosters introspection, awareness, and the unfolding of subtler layers of the personality.

II. BENEFITS OF YOGA

Yoga is not merely a physical exercise but a holistic process for manifesting innate potentialities and achieving all-round personal growth. It is thought to have beneficial effects on gene expression, the cardiovascular system, and the nervous system. Yoga enhances parasympathetic activity and increases GABA activity in the brain, which promotes relaxation by activating the vagus nerve. Slow diaphragmatic breathing, which is emphasized in yoga, also promotes mental stability and peace and helps calm the mind. While not a treatment for cancer, yoga improves quality of life for those who are afflicted with the disease by improving physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. For those battling cancer, yoga, breathing techniques, and meditation are essential tools for stress management, healing, and boosting both physical and mental vitality. In addition to relieving the load of uncomfortable symptoms and promoting a sense of strength and balance in the mind, body, and spirit, the practice cultivates acceptance and mindfulness of one's experience.

Yoga Asanas stabilize the mind, promote psycho-physical well-being and are described as stable, comfortable and effortless postures. Research distinguishes yoga asanas from mere physical exercises highlighting reduced muscular electrical activity during relaxed maintenance of asanas. It



enhances bodily and mental flexibility and foster inner silence and listening. Yoga classes often conclude with deep breathing and gradual relaxation, savasana, also known as corpse posture, helps students lose connection to worldly stresses. In addition, yoga promotes an open heart among practitioners, which promotes acceptance, calmness, and a more sympathetic outlook on life.

Holistic benefits yoga affects every cell of the body improving neuro-effector communication organ-system functioning resistance against stress and diseases and promoting tranquillity, balance, positive attitude and equanimity.

2.1 UNDERSTANDING BODY'S RESPONSE TOWARDS YOGA

Yoga's tremendous effects on neuroendocrine regulation are demonstrated by the way yoga affects the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis, an important pathway involved in the body's stress response. Yoga counteracts the body's effects of stress by activating the parasympathetic nervous system through focused breathing and movement.

1. **Neuroendocrine Regulation:** Yoga is associated with regulation of the hypothalamic- pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis. This includes hypothalamus, Pituitary gland, Adrenal gland. The hypothalamus detects stress and other stimuli, releasing corticotropin releasing hormone (CRH). CRH travels to the pituitary gland thereby stimulating the pituitary gland to release ACTH (adrenocorticotrophic hormone) into the bloodstream. ACTH travels to the adrenal glands, thereby stimulating the cortex region to release cortisol (stress hormone). The medulla region responds to the stress by releasing catecholamines such as adrenaline and noradrenaline. These hormones prepare the body for intense situations thereby increasing the heart rate, dilating airways, etc.[8]
2. **Autonomic Nervous System (ANS) modulation:** Yoga involves slow movements and controlled breathing, activating the parasympathetic system. Parasympathetic nervous system counteracts the sympathetic system to keep the body in a "rest" state.
3. **GABA activity:** GABA is associated with calming the brain. Elevated GABA levels are linked with reduced stress contributing to the mechanism of stress relief by yoga.[8]
4. **Inflammatory and endocrine responses:** Prolonged stress raises inflammation levels in the body, which can lead to a number of health problems. Yoga and other stress-reduction techniques have been associated with a decrease in inflammatory markers. The production of pro-inflammatory cytokines, which are signaling molecules involved in the immune response, may be modulated by yoga practices. Yoga can help create a more balanced and less inflammatory physiological state by controlling cytokine levels.[8]

2.2 IMPACT OF YOGA ON PHYSICAL WELL-BEING

Yoga combines physical exercise with an awareness-based, breath-based, and energy-focused approach. Its tenets stress individuality, self-determination, positive thinking as a key component of healing, and the interdependence of many facets of health. Applying yoga poses and practices to medical disorders, therapeutic yoga addresses the structural, physiological, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of pain and suffering. It improves quality of life and physical health making it a useful complement to traditional medical procedures.[11]

Yoga treatments enhance motor control, flexibility, muscular fitness, and performance. They also change metabolism, strengthen autonomic nervous systems, and strengthen lung ventilation. A few asanas promote blood circulation and cause physiological changes by raising the diastolic, pulse, and intra-gastric pressures. One of the many physical benefits of yoga is that it can help with aches and pains caused by conditions like arthritis and back discomfort. Other physical benefits include greater muscle strength, flexibility, and joint mobility. Due to its ability to increase full range of motion in the joints and improve blood flow to cartilage-rich areas, yoga may help avoid diseases like arthritis and chronic pain. The enhanced proprioception and balance that yoga provides also reduces the risk of falls and accidents.[11]

2.3 IMPACT OF YOGA ON MENTAL WELL BEING

People who are dealing with typical mental health disorders including depression, anxiety, stress, and sleeplessness frequently turn to complementary therapies like yoga. Yoga encourages calmness, deliberate breathing, and attention to the present moment, which helps the body transition from the fight-or-flight reaction to the relaxing, peaceful response. Heart rate, blood pressure, cortisol levels, and blood flow to essential organs are all lowered as a result. By blocking parts of the brain linked to anger and fear and activating those linked to pleasure, yoga promotes balanced energy production and strengthens the immune system. Regular yoga practice is associated with lower cortisol and monoamine oxidase levels as well as higher serotonin levels, both of which help to relieve depression. Many individuals choose yoga as a complementary approach due to medication side effects, lack of response, or personal preference, supported by numerous studies demonstrating its potential benefits for depression, stress, and anxiety.[14]

Yogic techniques enhance mental faculties such as perception, analytical faculty memory and overall personality characteristics. They improve attentiveness, decrease response time and reduce visual and auditory reaction times. Yoga practice brings about greater improvement in tasks requiring selective attention concentration and motor response. Yoga is an effective means of reducing the excessive stimulation and stress that



characterize modern life. They include behavioural instruction, relaxation techniques, and psychotherapy. Yoga is well-known for its capacity to promote mental equilibrium and produce relaxation. Yoga is an effective means of reducing the excessive stimulation and stress that characterize modern life.[14]

2.4 IMPACT OF YOGA ON VARIOUS HEALTH CONDITIONS

Since yoga's teachings and philosophy have endured, they are essential for promoting health and preventing illness in today's world.

Cardiovascular Endurance: Yoga has been demonstrated to improve cardiorespiratory function, psychological profile, and plasma melatonin levels in addition to its effects on mood disorders and stress reduction. It has also been shown to significantly lower mean arterial pressure, systolic and diastolic blood pressure, and orthostatic tolerance. In addition, yoga enhances autonomic balance, respiratory function, and general well-being in addition to improving the body's homeostatic regulation and cardiovascular efficiency. Yoga helps in thinning blood and strengthens the heart, which may reduce the risk of heart attack and stroke. These benefits come in addition to improving oxygen and blood flow. It has also been demonstrated that yoga-based lifestyle changes the coronary artery disease patient's myocardial perfusion and help their coronary lesions recede. Age-related declines in cardiovascular parameters are inevitable, but among people who consistently practice yoga, these declines occur more slowly. This is because people who practice yoga also tend to have lower heart rates. Anaerobic threshold, cardiac recovery index, and cardiovascular endurance all significantly improve with yoga exercise. Pranayama practitioners perform at higher work rates without increasing blood lactate levels or using as much oxygen.

Muscular endurance and fatigue: Yoga training increases muscular endurance delays onset of fatigue and enables individuals to perform work with lesser oxygen consumption.

Cancer: Research demonstrates that yoga has significant therapeutic benefits for cancer patients, including reduced incidence, severity, and anticipatory sensations of nausea following chemotherapy. Along with decreased pain and exhaustion, patients receiving yoga therapies also reported feeling more invigorated, accepting, and at ease, as well as lower levels of anxiety, sadness, and distressing symptoms. Additionally, research has shown that yoga, when combined with breathing techniques and meditation, can reduce stress, aid in the healing process, boost vitality, lessen the negative effects of cancer treatment, and improve treatment-related side effects.

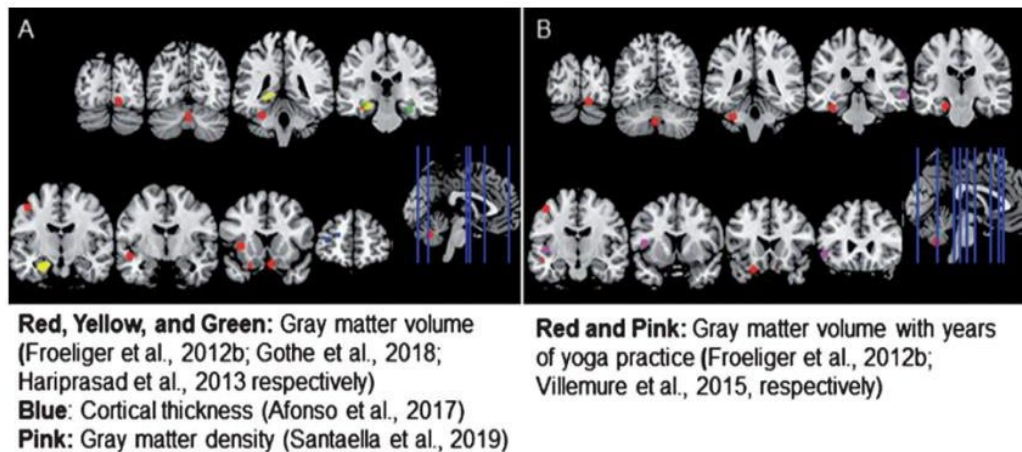
Insomnia: Promising results have been found in studies on how yoga affects insomnia and the quality of sleep. Regular yoga practice has been associated with a significant

reduction in the amount of time it takes to fall asleep, an extension of the duration of sleep, and an enhanced sense of morning refreshment. After taking yoga lessons, people with lymphoma have also reported improvements in their sleep habits. These results demonstrate how yoga may be used as a non-pharmacological intervention to promote general wellbeing and sleep quality. Alternative therapies like yoga are becoming more and more well-liked due to the negative consequences of pharmaceutical treatments for insomnia, which include cognitive impairment and excessive daytime sleepiness. **Diabetes:** A thorough yoga programme that includes breathing exercises, asanas, pranayama, kriya and meditation was created specifically for patients with diabetes. In addition to maintaining normal blood sugar levels, it helped in adapting to a more flexible and health-conscious way of living. There were several benefits noted, including stress-free blood pressure, simpler HbA1c normalization, prevention of weight gain, and maintenance of a normal lipid profile.[6,7]

Stress and anxiety: Long-term stress has a negative impact on the immune system and is linked to a number of physical and mental health problems, such as sadness and anxiety. Practices such as yoga and meditation are useful for managing and reducing acute and chronic stress, which reduces related comorbidities and improves quality of life overall. Yoga-based therapies show potential as a non-pharmacological treatment alternative for mood disorders. The psychological conditions of anxiety and related illnesses are common and have a significant social cost. Although there has been some progress in reducing the symptoms of anxiety, mindfulness practices are still not widely used. But yoga, which is more and more accessible and often represents health and well-being, is becoming more and more popular and similar to mindfulness-based therapies. Anxiety disorders and its associated diseases are prevalent psychiatric ailments that have a substantial socioeconomic cost. Even though there has been considerable improvement in easing anxiety symptoms, mindfulness techniques are still not common. However, yoga is growing in popularity and is comparable to mindfulness-based therapies since it is becoming more and more accessible and frequently symbolizes health and well-being.[6,7]

III. YOGA EFFECTS ON BRAIN HEALTH

While yoga's physical health benefits are well-documented, recent interest has focused on its active attentional components, including breathing and meditation, and their effects on brain structure and function. This investigation focuses on yoga's impact on brain structures, function, and cerebral blood flow using MRI, fMRI, and SPECT. The findings suggest positive effects on regions such as the hippocampus, amygdala, prefrontal cortex, cingulate cortex, and brain networks like the default mode networks (DMN)



Gothe NP, Khan I, Hayes J, Erlenbach E, Damoiseaux JS. Yoga Effects on Brain Health: A Systematic Review of the Current Literature. *Brain Plast.* 2019 Dec 26;5(1):105-122. DOI: 10.3233/BPL-190084. PMID: 31970064; PMCID: PMC6971819.

Figure 1 - Brain areas demonstrating A) an association between years of yoga practice and brain structure among practitioners, B) structural differences between yoga practitioners and non-practitioners.

In a number of locations, yoga practitioners showed higher cortical thickness, grey matter (GM) volume, and GM density than non-practitioners. There was also a favourable correlation seen in several domains between the years of yoga practice and GM volume among yoga practitioners.[1] The effects of yoga practice on brain function have been investigated through various studies, focusing on both task-related fMRI findings and functional connectivity.[1]

Task-related fMRI Findings: Three cross-sectional studies compared brain functioning between individuals with and without yoga experience. Notably, yoga practitioners showed less brain activation in the left dorsolateral prefrontal cortex during encoding tasks compared to non-practitioners. Additionally, a study demonstrated differences in emotional reactivity between groups during an affective Stroop task, with yoga practitioners exhibiting lesser activation in the right dorsolateral prefrontal cortex. Furthermore, differences in activation patterns were observed in the left superior frontal gyrus and left ventrolateral prefrontal cortex between practitioners and non-practitioners during emotional distraction tasks.[1]

Functional Connectivity Findings: A cross-sectional study examined resting-state functional brain connectivity and found greater connectivity between specific brain regions among yoga practitioners compared to non-practitioners. Another study explored longitudinal changes in functional connectivity following a 12-week yoga intervention,

revealing positive associations between improvements in verbal memory recall and changes in connectivity within the default mode network. Additionally, a study on cerebral blood flow found decreases in baseline bloodflow in certain brain regions following yoga intervention, as well as increased activity during meditation in various frontal and sensorimotor areas.[1]

These findings collectively suggest that yoga practice may influence brain function by modulating task-related activation patterns and enhancing functional connectivity between brain regions, potentially contributing to cognitive and emotional regulation. [1]

IV. YOGA'S INFLUENCE ACROSS VARIOUS AGE GROUPS

Students today face multiple stressors including intense use of technology, academic pressure, and sleep deprivation, leading to a rise in mental health issues like anxiety. These challenges can impact their physical and emotional well-being, hindering academic success and overall quality of life. However, research suggests that mind-body practices like yoga offer promising benefits for managing stress and anxiety in children. By incorporating therapeutic yoga into school curricula, there's potential to provide children with valuable tools for coping with stress, promoting mental health, and fostering holistic development. Consistent practice of yoga fosters a connection between the inner world and external environment, promoting holistic well-being by harmonizing the mind, body, and spirit. Through the coordination of these elements, children can cultivate resilience and inner balance amidst the challenges they face.[3]

The perceived benefits of long-term yoga practice among adults are physical pain, enhanced flexibility, improved sleep quality, cultivation of positive personality traits, heightened self-esteem, and better management of anxiety

and stress. Eighteen adult participants, who were regular practitioners of yoga and volunteered for the research, formed the sample. Data collection involved individual and focus group interviews, with subsequent analysis utilising content analysis methodology.[3]

The results showed four main ideas:

1. Participants reflected on the conceptual meaning of yoga, emphasizing its multifaceted nature encompassing physical, mental, and social dimensions.
2. They shared insights into their initial states before embarking on yoga practice, detailing their physical, mental, and social conditions.
3. Reasons for engaging in yoga were elucidated, encompassing personal growth, health improvement, and social connection.

4. Participants articulated their experiences regarding the impacts of yoga on their physical and mental well-being, as well as on their social relationships.

This highlighted the perceived benefits across physical, mental, and social domains through qualitative analysis. After two years of bi-weekly yoga sessions, participants reported reductions in pain and improved flexibility, enhanced spiritual relaxation, better sleep quality, heightened positive personality traits, increased self-esteem, and improved coping with anxiety and stress. The qualitative nature of the study allowed for a detailed exploration of participants experiences, reactions, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours in a realistic and systematic manner.[3]

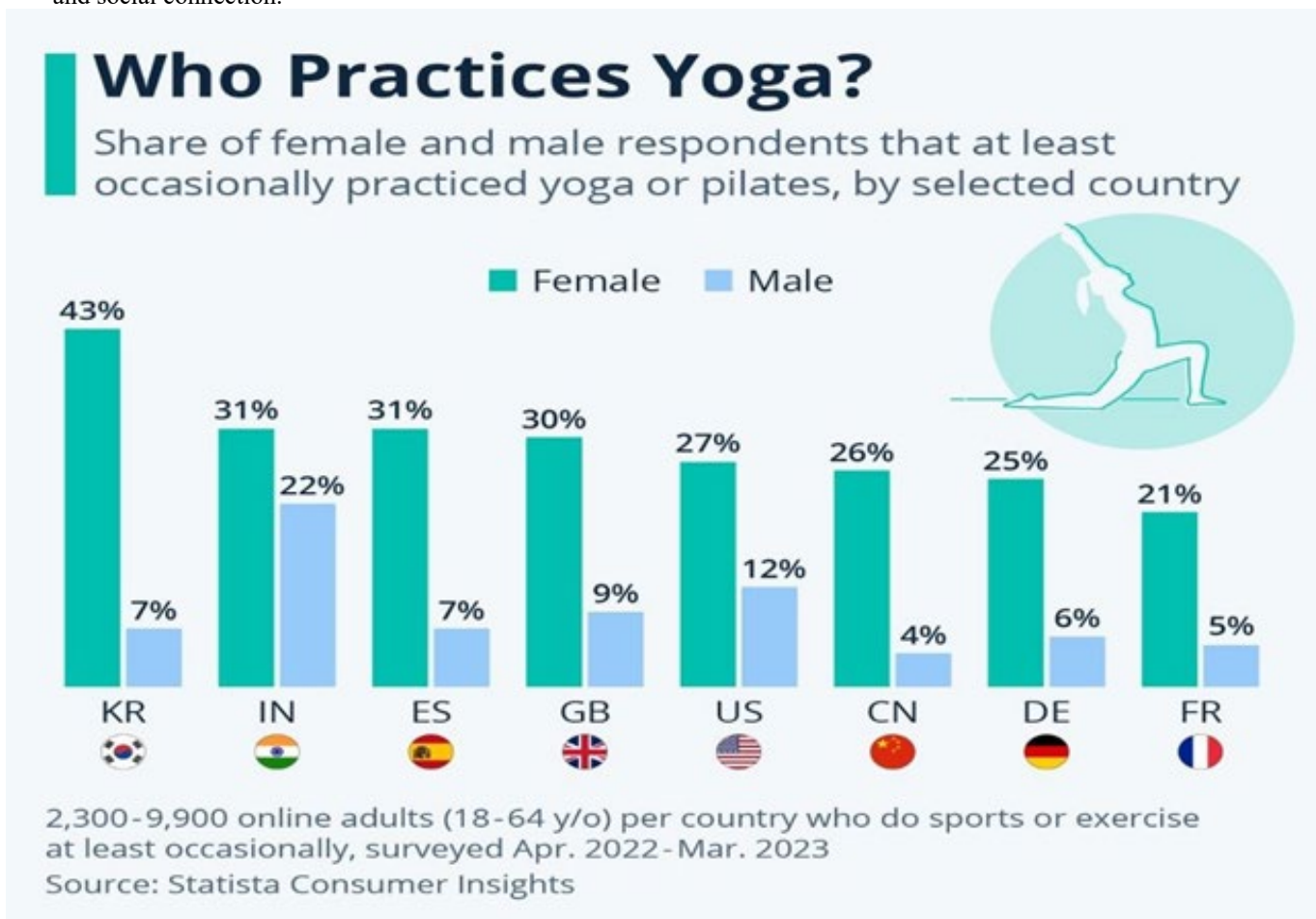


Figure 2 - Statistical analysis of the percentage of people practicing yoga across various countries Conclusion

V. CONCLUSION

To conclude, the examination of yoga provided in this thorough review indicates that it has a significant influence on people of all ages and spiritual, mental, and physical health. Yoga's holistic approach to wellness, which has its roots in ancient Indian civilization, highlights the connection between the body, mind, and spirit. From the

Vedic roots to the methodical path described in Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, yoga provides a life-changing path to enlightenment, inner calm, and self-discovery. Asanas, pranayama, and meditation are among the techniques that people can use to build resilience, reduce stress, and create a peaceful relationship with the Divine. Its adaptability and efficacy in fostering general wellness are highlighted by the



incorporation of yoga into therapeutic interventions, educational environments, and healthcare practices. Studies demonstrate the demonstrable advantages of yoga for physical well-being. Furthermore, yoga's versatility for a range of age groups and demographics makes it a useful tool for stress reduction, chronic illness management, and quality of life enhancement. Through the integration of yoga into everyday routines and educational curriculum, people can cultivate a comprehensive approach to health that integrates the mind, body, and spirit. The relevance and value of yoga in contemporary culture are becoming more widely acknowledged as our understanding of it continues to grow. Yoga provides a route to improved well-being and fulfilment by lowering the burden of chronic illnesses and building students' resilience. Yoga is essentially a path of inner harmony, self-discovery, and transformation. We set out on a path to a better, more balanced life as we accept its principles and practices, on a personal and a societal level.

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