

## Influence of Yoga on Mental Health Among University Students

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The present study explores the influence of Yoga on mental health and emotional well-being among university students aged 18–25 years in urban India. Amid growing concerns over youth mental health globally, this qualitative inquiry adopts an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to understand the lived experiences of student Yoga practitioners. Twelve participants with a minimum of three months of regular Yoga practice were selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected via semi-structured interviews and analysed thematically. Nine key themes emerged, including emotional regulation, increased self-awareness, better sleep, improved interpersonal relationships, enhanced self-confidence, spiritual connectedness, academic focus, physical fitness, and emotional release. The findings suggest that Yoga offers holistic benefits by addressing both psychological and physical aspects of well-being. The integration of yogic practices in campus wellness programs, psychotherapy, and public mental health interventions is recommended. This study reinforces existing literature while highlighting the need for longitudinal and comparative research to further establish Yoga 's efficacy as a complementary mental health strategy for young adults.

**Keywords:** Yoga, mental health, university students, qualitative research, emotional well-being, interpretative phenomenological analysis, India

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## Introduction

Youth mental health has declined globally due to megatrends and social shifts.[1] According to the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), adolescent subjective well-being is declining worldwide, indicating a worsening mental health landscape.[2] In the Indian context, a recent study highlights the psychological challenges faced by young adult students pursuing higher education in Tier-1 cities, emphasizing the growing prevalence of mental health issues in this demographic.[3]

The popularity of *Yoga* has increased within the last several decades. Because of its many advantages, celebrities and medical experts are now embracing and endorsing regular *Yoga* practice. Others attest to how incredible this kind of exercise feels, while others dismiss *Yoga* as just another popular trend and link it to the mysticism of the new age. They fail to comprehend that what they consider to be just another kind of exercise would benefit them in ways they never would have thought possible. It is crucial to comprehend the true nature of *Yoga* before delving into its advantages. *Yoga* is a way of life That strives for a healthy body and mind; it is not a religion. According to Indian Ayurveda, *Yoga* aids in the development of a balance between the three aspects of a man's nature: physical, mental, and spiritual. Aerobics and other types of exercise only guarantee physical health. These activities don't really help with Astral or spiritual body development.[4]

### Yoga

The word *Yoga* is derived from the Sanskrit root *Yuj* meaning to bind, join, attach and yoke, to direct and concentrate one's attention on, to use and apply. It also means union or communion.

It is the true union of our will with the will of God. 'It thus means, says Mahadev Desai in his introduction to the Gita according to Gandhi, 'the yoking of all the powers of body, mind and soul to God; it means the disciplining of the intellect, the mind, the emotions, the will, which that *Yoga* presupposes; it means a poise of the soul which enables one to look at life in all its aspects evenly.'

*Yoga* is one of the six orthodox systems of Indian philosophy. It was collated, co-ordinated and systematized by Patanjali in his classical work, the *Yoga Sutras*, which consists of 185 terse aphorisms.

In Indian thought, everything is permeated by the Supreme Universal Spirit (*Paramātmā* or God) of which the individual human spirit (*Jivatma*) is a part. The system of *Yoga* is so called because it teaches the means by which the *Jivātmā* can be united to, or be in communion with the *Paramatmā*, and so secure liberation (*Moksa*).

### Eight limbs of Ashtanga Yoga

#### 1. Yama (Restraints) - Restraints, moral disciplines or moral vows

This first limb, *Yama* (Restraints), refers to vows, disciplines or practices that are primarily concerned with the world around us, and our interaction with it. While the practice of *Yoga* can indeed increase physical strength and flexibility and aid in calming the mind, what's the point if we're still rigid, weak and stressed-out in day-to-day life?

There are five *Yamas*:

- *Ahimsa* (Non-violence)
- *Satya* (Truthfulness)
- *Asteya* (Non-stealing)
- *Brahmacharya* (Right use of energy)
- *Aparigraha* (Non-hoarding)

*Yoga* is a practice of transforming and benefitting every aspect of life, not just the 60 minutes spent on a rubber mat; if we can learn to be kind, truthful and use our energy in a worthwhile way, we will not only benefit ourselves with our practice, but everything and everyone around us. In BKS Iyengar's translation of the sutras 'Light on the *Yoga Sutras*', he explains that *Yamas* are 'unconditioned by time, class and place', meaning no matter who we are, where we come from, or how much *Yoga* we've practised, we can all aim to instil the *Yamas* within us.

#### 2. Niyama (Observances) – Positive duties or observances

The second limb of the 8 limbs of *Yoga*, *Niyama* (Observances), usually refers to internal duties. The prefix 'ni' is a Sanskrit verb which means 'inward' or 'within'.

There are five *Niyamas*:

- *Saucha* (Cleanliness)
- *Santosha* (Contentment)
- *Tapas* (Discipline)

- *Svadhya* (Self-reflection)
- *Isvarapranidaha* (Surrender to a higher power).

*Niyamas* are traditionally practiced by those who wish to travel further along the Yogic path and are intended to build character. Interestingly, the *Niyamas* closely relate to the *Koshas* (Sheaths), our 'sheaths' or 'layers' leading from the physical body to the essence within. As you'll notice, when we work with the *Niyamas* – from *Saucha* (Cleanliness) to *isvarapranidhana* – we are guided from the largest aspects of ourselves to the truth within.

### 3. Asana (Posture)

The physical aspect of Yoga is third step on path to freedom, and if we're being honest, word *Asana* (Posture) here doesn't refer to ability to perform a handstand or an aesthetically impressive backbend, it means 'seat' – specifically seat you would take for practice of meditation. The only alignment instruction Patanjali gives for this *Asana* (Posture) is "*Sthira Sukham Asanam*", posture should be steady and comfortable.

While traditional texts like the Hatha Yoga *Pradipika* list many postures such as *Padmasana* (lotus pose) and *Virasana* (hero pose) suitable for meditation, this text also tells us that the most important posture is, in fact, *Sthirasukhasana* – meaning, 'a posture the practitioner can hold comfortably and motionlessness'.

The idea is to be able to sit in comfort so we're not 'pulled' by aches and pains or restlessness due to being uncomfortable. Perhaps this is something to consider in your next *Yoga* class if you always tend to choose the 'advanced' posture offered, rather than the one your body is able to achieve: "In how many poses are we really comfortable and steady?"

### 4. Pranayama (Breathing Techniques)

The word *Prana* refers to 'energy' or 'life source'. It often describes the very essence that keeps us alive, as well as the energy in the universe around us. *Prana* also often describes the breath, and by working with the way we breathe, we affect the mind in a very real way.

"Perhaps one of the most fascinating things about *Pranayama* (Breathing Techniques) is the fact that it can mean two totally different things, which may lead us in two totally different directions at this point on the path to freedom."

We can interpret *Pranayama* (Breathing Techniques) in a couple of ways. '*Prana-yama* (Restrains)' can mean 'breath control' or 'breath restraint', or '*Prana-ayama*' which would translate as 'freedom of breath', 'breath expansion' or 'breath liberation'.

The physical act of working with different breathing techniques alters the mind in a myriad of ways – we can choose calming practices like *Chandra Bhadana* (moon piercing breath) or more stimulating techniques such as *Kapalabhati* (shining skull cleansing breath).

Each way of breathing will change our state of being, but it's up to us as to whether we perceive this as 'controlling' the way we feel or 'freeing' ourselves from the habitual way our mind may usually be.

### 5. Pratyahara (Sense Withdrawal)

*Pratya* means to 'withdraw', 'draw in' or 'draw back', and second part *Ahara* refers to anything we 'take in' by ourselves, such as various sights, sounds and smells our senses take in continuously. When sitting for a formal meditation practice, this is likely to be first thing we do when we think we're meditating; we focus on 'drawing in'. The practice of drawing inward may include focusing on way we're breathing, so this limb would relate directly to practice of *Pranayama* (Breathing Techniques) too.

The phrase 'sense withdrawal' conjures up Images of being able to switch our senses 'off' through concentration, which is why this aspect of practice is often misunderstood.

Instead of actually losing the ability to hear and smell, to see and feel, the practice of *Pratyahara* (Sense Withdrawal) changes our state of mind so that we become so absorbed in what it is we're focusing on, that the things outside of ourselves no longer bother us and we're able to meditate without becoming easily distracted. Experienced practitioners may be able to translate *Pratyahara* (Sense Withdrawal) into everyday life – being so concentrated and present to the moment at hand, that things like sensations and sounds don't easily distract the mind.

### 6. Dharana (Focused Concentration)

*Dharana* means 'focused concentration'. *Dha* means 'holding or maintaining', and *Ana* means 'other' or 'something else'.

Closely linked to the previous two limbs; *Dharana* (Focused Concentration) and *Pratyahara* (Sense Withdrawal) are essential parts of the same aspect. In order to focus on something, we must withdraw our senses so that all attention is on that point of concentration. In order to draw our senses in, we must focus and concentrate intently. *Tratak* (candle gazing), visualization, and focusing on the breath are all practices of *Dharana* (Focused Concentration), and it's this stage many of us get to when we think we're 'meditating'.

### 7. *Dhyana* (Meditative Absorption)

The seventh limb is 'meditative absorption' - when we become completely absorbed in the focus of our meditation, and this is when we're really meditating. All the things we may learn in class are merely techniques in order to help us settle, focus and concentrate. The actual practice of meditation is definitely not something we can actively 'do', rather it describes the spontaneous action of something that happens as a result of everything else. Essentially; if you are really meditating, you won't have the thought 'oh, I'm meditating!'. (sound familiar?)

### 8. *Samadhi* (Bliss or Enlightenment)

Many of us know the word *Samadhi* as meaning 'bliss' or 'enlightenment', and this is the final step of the journey of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras. After we've re-organized our relationships with the outside world and our own inner world, we come to the finale of bliss.

When we look at the word *Samadhi* (Bliss or Enlightenment) though, we find out that 'enlightenment' or 'realization' does not refer to floating away on a cloud in a state of happiness and ecstasy.... Sorry.

Breaking the word in half, we see that this final stage is made up of two words; '*Sama*' meaning 'same' or 'equal', and '*dhi*' meaning 'to see'. There's a reason it's called realization. It's because achieving *Samadhi* (Bliss or Enlightenment) is not about escapism, floating away or being abundantly joyful; it's about realizing the very life that lies in front of us. The ability to 'see equally' and without disturbance from the mind, without our experience being conditioned by likes, dislikes or habits, without a need to judge or become attached to any particular aspect; that is bliss.[6]

### Mental Health

Mental health is a dynamic state of internal equilibrium which enables individuals to use their abilities in harmony with universal values of society. Basic cognitive and social skills; ability to recognize, express and modulate one's own emotions, as well as empathize with others; flexibility and ability to cope with adverse life events and function in social roles; and harmonious relationship between body and mind represent important components of mental health which contribute, to varying degrees, to the state of internal equilibrium.[7]

*Yoga* is documented as one of several traditional therapeutic systems by the World Health Organization. *Yoga* provides strength and self-control to face the challenges in an individual's life. It has been practiced widely across the globe and becoming more relevant in today's conflict-ridden world. Regular *Yoga* practitioners demonstrated the improvement in pulmonary functions, cardiorespiratory fitness, endurance, and flexibility.

Practitioners believed that their interpersonal relationships improved because their attitude and perspective had changed, making them more patient, kind, mindful, and self-aware. They expressed an aspect of community that was both practical (they met new friends) and spiritual (they felt they belonged). They thought they could better weather difficulties such as divorce and death.

A number discussed feeling a sense of purpose and that their practice contributed to a greater good. *Yoga* can reduce depressive symptoms by alleviating stress. Studies have shown that *Yoga* can reduce inflammation, maintain autonomic balance and also have a role in maintaining the neurotransmitters.

It has role on hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis, the peripheral nervous system including GABA, limbic system activity, inflammatory and endocrine responses. *Yoga* along with antidepressants can help in reducing the depressive symptoms in patient with MDD. *Yoga* is an ideal complementary and alternative therapy for mental health disorders.

### Literature Review

Castellote-Caballero et al. (2024) conducted a study assessed the impact of a 12-week *Yoga* program on 129 university students.

Results demonstrated significant reductions in perceived stress (Cohen's  $d = 0.44$ ), state anxiety ( $d = 0.38$ ), trait anxiety ( $d = 0.80$ ), and enhancements in emotional well-being ( $d = 0.47$ ) in the *Yoga* group compared to the control group.

Baibhav (2024) conducted a study emphasized the relevance of *Yoga* in health and stress management, highlighting its benefits in achieving a balance between physical, mental, and spiritual aspects, as per Indian Ayurveda.

Brandão et al. (2024) found from the Online Kundalini *Yoga* sessions they conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic significantly improved mental health outcomes, including stress and anxiety levels, among university students.

Raut (2024) conducted a study by comparing 30 regular *Yoga* practitioners to 30 non-practitioners among graduate students aged 20-24, this study found that regular *Yoga* practice was associated with significantly better mental health scores, and lower levels of anxiety and depression.

Andrabi et al. (2023) conducted a study on undergraduate nursing students participating in a *Yoga* program showed significant improvements in psychological and cardiovascular outcomes, indicating *Yoga*'s effectiveness in enhancing mental health.

Gladden et al. (2022) conducted a mixed-methods study, where 17 university students participated in a therapeutic *Yoga* program aimed at reducing anxiety. Quantitative measures showed significant reductions in anxiety levels, while qualitative feedback highlighted improvements in relaxation and coping skills.

Strand et al. (2021) conducted a randomized controlled trial involving 202 university students in Oslo, participants attended 24 *Yoga* sessions over 12 weeks. The study found significant reductions in psychological distress and improvements in sleep quality among the *Yoga* group compared to the control group. These benefits persisted at a 3-month follow-up, indicating sustained effects of the *Yoga* intervention.

Marquez & Long (2020) analyzing data from Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), this study highl. global decline in adolescent subjective well-being, indicating worsening mental health landscape among youth worldwide.

Bhutekar (2020) conducted this study investigated the effects of *Yoga* on stress and mental health among 80 college students aged 20-25. Utilizing a pre-post research design, results indicated that *Yoga* practice significantly reduced stress levels and enhanced mental health outcomes.

Lemay et al. (2019) conducted a study on Pharmacy students who participated in *Yoga* and meditation interventions reported decreased stress and anxiety, highlighting the benefits of such practices in academic settings.

Mathad et al. (2017) conducted a randomized waitlist control trial evaluated the effects of an eight-week *Yoga* intervention on 100 nursing students. The intervention group showed significant improvements in self-compassion and mindfulness compared to the control group.

Quach et al. (2016) conducted a school-based *Yoga* program which led to improvements in mood and emotional regulation among adolescents, suggesting potential benefits for university students as well.

Falsafi (2016) conducted a randomized controlled trial comparing mindfulness and *Yoga* interventions found both effective in reducing depression and anxiety among college students, with *Yoga* showing slightly greater benefits.

Lin et al. (2015) conducted a randomized controlled trial to evaluate the effects of a 12-week *Yoga* program on work-related stress, stress adaptation, and autonomic nerve activity among mental health professionals. Compared to a control group that did not engage in *Yoga*, participants in the *Yoga* group showed a significant reduction in work-related stress and an improvement in autonomic nerve activity. While stress adaptation improved within the *Yoga* group, the between-group difference in adaptation was not statistically significant.

Pandit & Satish (2014) conducted a systematic *Yoga* intervention over three months resulted in significant reductions in stress and improvements in mental health among school-aged children, indicating long-term benefits.

Hagins et al. (2013) conducted *Yoga* interventions in schools showed promise in reducing stress reactivity and improving coping mechanisms among students, suggesting applicability for university populations.

Khalsa et al. (2012) conducted *Yoga* practice among high school students improved anger control and mood, demonstrating its potential in managing emotional challenges in educational settings.

Noggle et al. (2012) conducted regular *Yoga* sessions enhanced emotional regulation and resilience among adolescents, supporting its inclusion in school curricula for mental health promotion.

Gururaja et al. (2011) conducted a study involving 25 healthy volunteers divided into senior (65–75 years) and younger (20–30 years) groups, participants attended 90-minute *Yoga* sessions once or twice a week for a month. Both groups exhibited significant reductions in salivary amylase activity and anxiety scores, indicating decreased stress levels post-intervention.

Iyengar (2005) in the comprehensive guide, Iyengar elucidates the philosophy and practice of *Yoga*, detailing its eight limbs and emphasizing its role in achieving mental and physical well-being.

## Methodology

### Research Design

This study adopted qualitative research design grounded in interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to explore lived experiences of university students who practice *Yoga* & its influence on their mental health. Qualitative inquiry was appropriate for this research as it allowed for an in-depth understanding of subjective psychological & emotional transformations that may not be fully captured through quantitative measures.

### Research Approach

An exploratory phenomenological approach was used to gain insights into how *Yoga* practitioners among university students perceive and describe the changes in their mental health and emotional well-being. This approach centers on capturing participants' meaning-making processes, which aligns with the subjective and experiential focus of the study.

### Sampling Technique

The study used purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling method, to recruit participants who were university students and engaged in regular *Yoga* practice.

This criterion-based selection ensured that the participants had firsthand experience with *Yoga*, making them suitable informants for the research objectives.

### Participants

Twelve participants (university students aged 18–25 years) were selected based on their regular engagement with *Yoga* (minimum of three months of consistent practice). Gender was not considered a variable of analysis. Participants were from the Department of *Yoga*, affiliated with a reputed university in Noida. They were identified with the assistance of the *Yoga* Professor from that department. Their *Yoga* practices included a combination of asanas (postures), pranayama (Breathing Techniques) (breathwork), and meditation.

### Data Collection

Data were collected through structured interviews conducted in person and recorded with prior informed consent. Each interview lasted approximately 30–45 minutes and followed an open-ended interview guide that encouraged participants to reflect on how *Yoga* had influenced their emotional, psychological, and social experiences. The interviews were conducted in English and Hindi depending on participants' comfort and were later transcribed for analysis.

### Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical standards outlined by the institutional ethics committee. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained before the interviews. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by assigning pseudonyms to participants. All data were stored securely and used exclusively for academic purposes.

### Data Analysis

The transcribed interviews were analysed using thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The process involved familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, identifying themes, reviewing and refining themes, and producing a coherent narrative. NVivo software or manual coding sheets were used to support systematic coding. Emergent themes reflected both common and unique elements of participants' experiences with *Yoga* and mental health.



### Trustworthiness of Data

To ensure credibility and rigor in the qualitative analysis, methods such as member checking, peer debriefing, and audit trails were employed. Direct quotations were used in the results section to support themes and enhance authenticity. Reflexivity was practiced throughout the process to bracket researcher bias and remain sensitive to participants' perspectives.

## Results

Thematic analysis of participants' narratives revealed nine distinct themes that represent the perceived impact of *Yoga* on the mental health and emotional well-being of young adults. Each theme was derived from recurring patterns across responses and quantified by coding frequency to reflect their relative prevalence.

### 1. Emotional Regulation and Calmness

This was the most frequently mentioned theme, with 21% of participants reporting a noticeable reduction in anxiety, irritability, and stress. Respondents described feeling "calmer," "more emotionally balanced," and "better able to control reactions" after engaging in regular *Yoga* practice. This aligns with prior studies linking yogic breathwork and asanas to decreased cortisol levels and improved stress responses.

### 2. Improved Self-awareness and Mindfulness

17% of participants highlighted how *Yoga* increased their capacity for introspection & present-moment awareness. Statements such as "I've become more mindful of my thoughts" & "I now observe my emotions without reacting impulsively" were common. This self-awareness helped individuals recognize stress triggers & improve their coping strategies.

### 3. Better Sleep Quality and Relaxation

13% reported improvements in sleep hygiene, depth of rest, and general relaxation. Participants mentioned fewer sleep disturbances and easier transitions to sleep, often attributing this to evening *Yoga* sessions and breathing exercises like *Nadi Shodhana* and *Yoga Nidra*. The reduction in somatic tension was also a key factor.

### 4. Positive Interpersonal Relationships

12% discussed becoming more patient, empathetic,

and effective in relationships. They noted being "less reactive" and "more understanding in conversations," attributing these changes to a greater sense of inner peace and reduced emotional volatility. This aligns with findings that *Yoga* enhances emotional intelligence and interpersonal sensitivity.

### 5. Increased Self-confidence and Empowerment

10% expressed that *Yoga* helped them "feel more confident," "secure in their identity," and "capable of facing challenges." The physical strength and discipline cultivated through asanas translated into psychological empowerment. Participants shared how confronting difficult poses helped build resilience and belief in their own capacity.

### 6. Spiritual Connection and Sense of Purpose

8% experienced a sense of spiritual awakening or deeper existential connection through regular practice. Comments like "I feel connected to something bigger" and "*Yoga* gave me purpose" reflect the meditative and devotional aspects of *Yoga*, aligning with traditional interpretations of Samadhi (Bliss or Enlightenment) and Isvarapranidhana (Surrender to a higher power).

### 7. Improved Focus and Academic Performance

7% credited *Yoga* with enhancing their concentration and productivity. Practices involving breath awareness and meditative focus (dharana (Focused Concentration)) were linked with improved attention span and reduced procrastination. Participants shared experiences of being "less distracted," "more organized," and "more effective with time management."

### 8. Physical Fitness and Energy

6% of participants reported improvements in stamina, flexibility, and body awareness. These changes contributed indirectly to better mental health through higher energy levels and increased motivation. Respondents often linked their improved physical state to a better emotional baseline, describing feeling "lighter" or "more energetic."

### 9. Emotional Catharsis and Release

6% expressed that *Yoga* facilitated emotional release, helping them process buried grief, anger, or sadness.

This was often described as “unexpected crying during practice” or “emotions surfacing during long-held poses.” This theme underscores *Yoga*’s role as a somatic therapy and its ability to unlock emotional tension stored in the body.

### Proposed Interventions

Based on these findings, the following interventions are recommended to harness *Yoga*’s benefits for youth mental health:

#### 1. Campus Yoga and Mindfulness Programs

Institutions should offer structured, non-religious *Yoga* and meditation programs integrated into student wellness services. Tailored classes focusing on stress relief, emotional balance, and sleep improvement would be most beneficial.

#### 2. Mental Health Integration

*Yoga* can be formally included in psychotherapy and counseling models as a complementary practice, especially for anxiety, insomnia, and mild depressive symptoms. *Yoga* therapists or certified instructors could collaborate with mental health professionals to deliver integrative care.

#### 3. Online Access and Inclusivity

Develop accessible digital platforms offering *Yoga* modules for specific mental health concerns (e.g., “*Yoga* for Exam Stress,” “*Yoga* for Sleep,” “*Yoga* for Self-confidence”). Making these resources free or low-cost ensures wider outreach, especially in urban Tier-1 and Tier-2 cities.

#### 4. Awareness and Education Workshops

Conduct regular awareness campaigns and workshops demystifying *Yoga*, highlighting its evidence-based benefits and addressing myths that may hinder adoption among youth.

#### 5. Incorporate Yogic Ethics in Character Education

Embedding teachings from yogic philosophy (non-violence, contentment, self-discipline) in academic curricula or life skills training may foster emotional intelligence and ethical behavior among students.

### Future Research Directions

To expand upon this qualitative analysis, the following future research pathways are recommended:

#### 1. Longitudinal Studies

Examine long-term mental health outcomes of reg. *Yoga* practice among students over 6 months to 2 years, measuring sustained changes in anxiety, sleep, self-esteem, and academic performance.

#### 2. Comparative Group Studies

Conduct randomized controlled trials comparing *Yoga* participants with control groups (e.g., sports participants, mindfulness-only groups) to isolate the unique effects of *Yoga* on mental health.

#### 3. Demographic Analysis

Investigate differences across gender, socioeconomic background, or academic disciplines to determine which groups benefit most or require different modes of instruction.

#### 4. Neurobiological and Physiological Mechanisms

Combine subjective experiences with biomarker studies (e.g., cortisol, HRV, EEG patterns) to explore how *Yoga* alters brain and nervous system functioning in young adults.

#### 5. Yoga as a Preventive Tool in Mental Health Policy

Explore the feasibility and outcomes of incorporating *Yoga*-based interventions in national youth mental health strategies and policies, especially in urban educational settings.

**Table 1.1**

Theme	Total Occurrence	Male	Female	Total %	Male %	Female %
Emotional and Mental Well-being	10	5	5	83.33	71.42	100
On-and-Off Practice Pattern / Personal Values	3	3	0	25	42.85	0
Improved Focus and Cognitive Clarity	10	5	5	83.33	71.42	100
Meditation as Transformative / Preferred Modality	8	5	3	66.66	71.42	60
Personal Growth and Life Philosophy Shift	8	5	3	66.66	71.42	60
Challenges in Yoga Practice	10	5	5	83.33	71.42	100
Physical Benefits and Psychosomatic Impact	10	5	5	83.33	71.42	100
Enhanced Interpersonal Outlook	7	3	4	58.33	42.85	80
Sense of Purpose and Altruism	5	3	2	41.66	42.85	40
Environmental Influence	10	5	5	83.33	71.42	100



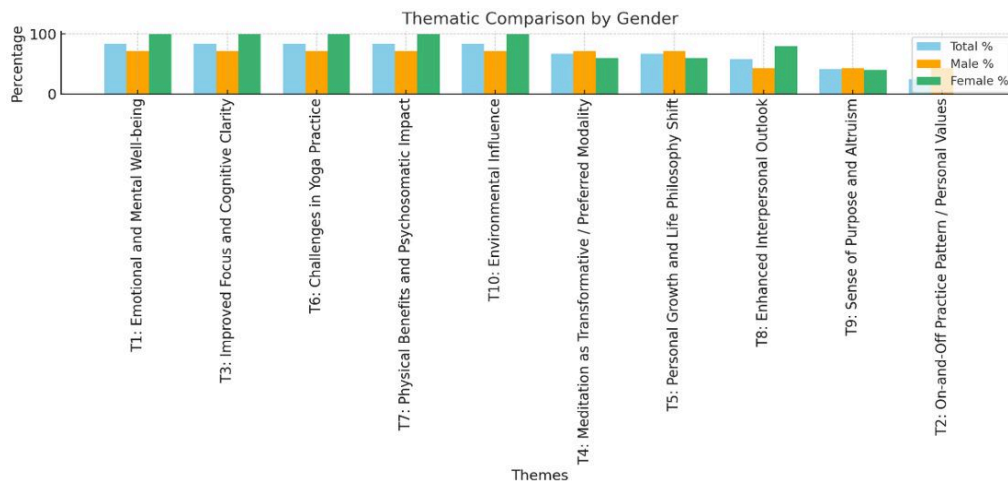


Figure 1.1

Conceptual Flowchart: Yoga Practices to Mental Health Outcomes

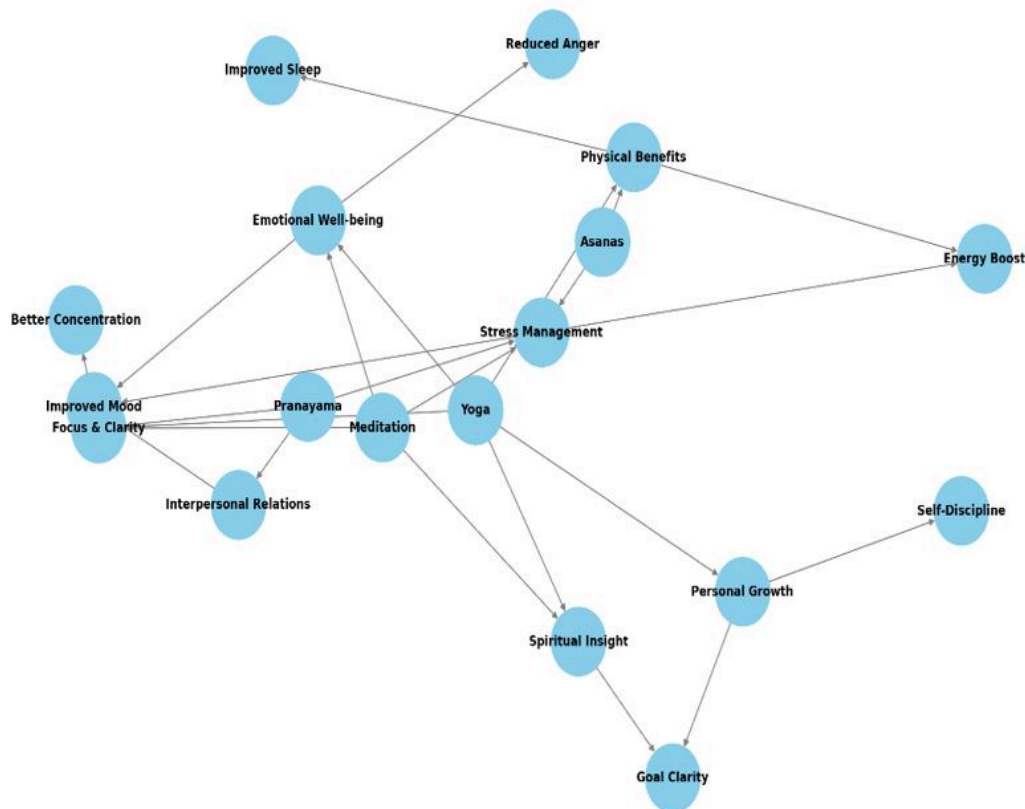


Figure 1.2

## Discussion

The results reinforce existing literature on *Yoga* 's multifaceted benefits for mental health. The strong presence of themes like emotional regulation, mindfulness, and behavioral change suggests that *Yoga* 's impact extends beyond the mat into everyday life. This aligns with Ross et al. (2014), who found that *Yoga* improves interpersonal relationships and instills a sense of community and belonging.

Increase in self-awareness & mindfulness resonates with Niyama (Observances) & Dharana (Focused Concentration) limbs of *Ashtanga Yoga*, which emphasize self-study & concentrated focus. As indicated by Iyengar (2005) & Carrico (2021), these inner disciplines are critical for cultivating mental balance, finding echoed by participants who reported introspective growth & improved emotional literacy. Furthermore, enhancement in physical health—such as better sleep & reduced bodily tension—supports Gohel et al. (2021),

Who identified long-term *Yoga* practice as beneficial for both physical and mental health. The bidirectional relationship between physical and mental states may explain the synergistic improvements noted by participants. Spiritual connectedness, although less commonly mentioned, reveals *Yoga* 's potential in addressing existential concerns and promoting a sense of life purpose—elements linked to long-term psychological resilience.<sup>[10]</sup> Importantly, this study aligns with Gururaja et al. (2011) and Lin et al. (2015), whose quantitative findings support the qualitative experiences expressed by participants here. The consistent reduction in anxiety, stress, and physiological arousal reported in those studies provides further empirical support to the lived experiences captured in this thematic analysis.

## Conclusion

This study explored impact of *Yoga* on mental health and emotional well-being of young adults in urban India. Through thematic analysis, it uncovered five key areas of benefit: emotional regulation, enhanced self-awareness, positive behavioral change, improved physical well-being, and sense of spiritual purpose. *Yoga* appears to function as holistic modality that addresses both mind and body, fostering not only symptom relief but also personal growth and transformation. Its emphasis on breath, movement, and ethical living makes it uniquely suited to support mental health in sustainable and integrated manner. Given growing mental health challenges faced by youth in high-pressure environments, findings suggest that incorporating *Yoga* into daily routines or institutional settings like universities could be low-cost, high-impact intervention. Future research could extend this work by conducting longitudinal studies to track changes over time and incorporating diverse participant groups to increase generalizability.

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