



International Journal of Research in Academic World

Received: 05/January/2026

IJRAW: 2026; 5(2):113-116

Accepted: 15/February/2026

Integrated Wellness: *Yoga* and Spirituality as Tools against Lifestyle and Mental Health Challenges

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Abstract

Lifestyle disorders such as obesity, diabetes, hypertension, anxiety, and cardiovascular diseases are rapidly increasing due to sedentary habits, unhealthy diet, and chronic stress. Conventional medical approaches often focus on symptomatic treatment, highlighting the need for preventive and holistic strategies. This study explores the role of Yoga and spirituality as integrated tools for preventing and managing lifestyle and mental health challenges. A conceptual and observational approach was adopted, supported by classical Ayurvedic literature, modern wellness frameworks, and a small-scale survey conducted among 20 competitive examination students using the Hamilton Anxiety Rating Scale (HAM-A). Findings revealed low adoption of regular yogic practices despite high levels of stress and anxiety. Students practicing yoga reported improved sleep, emotional regulation, concentration, and stress resilience. The study emphasizes the four pillars of yogic living—Achar (healthy activities), Vichar (positive thoughts), Ahar (balanced diet), and Vihar (recreational balance)—along with spiritual practices such as meditation and self-reflection. The results suggest that integrating physical, mental, and spiritual dimensions of Yoga can provide a sustainable model for holistic wellness. Promoting awareness and structured implementation in educational and healthcare systems is recommended to address the growing burden of non-communicable and stress-related disorders.

Keywords: Yoga, Spirituality, Lifestyle Disorders, Mental Health, Holistic Wellness.

Introduction

Lifestyle disorders like obesity, diabetes, hypertension, anxiety, and cardiovascular diseases have become more prevalent in today's hectic and demanding world. These conditions are largely caused by unhealthy daily habits such as sedentary behavior, poor nutrition, substance abuse, and chronic stress. Preventive and holistic approaches are becoming more and more necessary since traditional medicine frequently concentrates on treating symptoms.

Yoga and spirituality have emerged as effective tools for treating and preventing these disorders. Yoga encourages physical, mental, and emotional well-being, whereas spirituality fosters inner peace, resilience, and a sense of purpose. Despite their potential, the incorporation of these elements is underutilized in traditional health models.

Yoga can be an effective tool for preventing or treating lifestyle-related diseases (primarily caused by sedentary behavior, alcohol or tobacco consumption, overeating, stress, anxiety and obesity). In Western societies and research, yoga is frequently reduced to a form of physical exercise and stretching. The majority of yoga practices in the West are

classified as "*Hatha yoga*" a body-focused practice that includes physical postures (*Asana*) and breathing exercises (*Pranayama*).

Aim

To explore the role of Yoga and spirituality as preventive and therapeutic tools for lifestyle disorders and mental health issues, and to assess their current level of adoption - particularly among students while emphasizing the importance of an integrated, holistic wellness model that includes physical, mental, and spiritual dimensions.

Materials

Literatures will be collected from different classical textbooks of *Ayurveda*, from journals and from dissertations.

Methods

This paper takes a conceptual and observational approach, supported by ancient yogic philosophy, contemporary wellness frameworks, and a small-scale student survey.

Sampling Method:

A random sampling method was used, selecting library students who regularly study there from more than 1 year for competitive examinations

Inclusion Criteria**Inclusion Criteria:**

- Students who regularly study in the library.
- Students preparing for competitive examinations.
- Students willing to participate in the survey.

Exclusion Criteria

- Students who use the library only occasionally.
- Students not preparing for competitive examinations.
- Students unwilling to participate in the survey.

Study Tools

Validated questionnaires Hamilton Anxiety Rating Scale (HAM-A or HARS), including the It consists of 14 items, covering both psychic anxiety (mental agitation and distress) and somatic anxiety (physical complaints related to anxiety).

It explores:

- 1. Yogic Principles:** Traditional yoga emphasizes four pillars of healthy living -
 - *Achar* (healthy activities)
 - *Vichar* (positive thoughts)
 - *Ahar* (balanced diet)
 - *Vihar* (recreational balance)
- 2. Yogic Practices:**
 - *Asanas* (physical postures)
 - *Pranayama* (breathing techniques)
 - Meditation and relaxation practices
- 3. Spiritual Dimensions:**
 - Connection to inner self (soul/consciousness)
 - Belief in higher power or universal energy
 - Harmony with nature and life's deeper purpose
- 4. Survey Data:**
 - A survey was conducted with 20 students in a college library who self-reported experiencing anxiety and stress.
 - They were asked if they practiced yoga or spiritual techniques for stress management.

Types of Yoga to Practice for a Balanced Lifestyle:

Kundalini yoga: The word 'Kundalini' is a Sanskrit term and roughly translates to life force energy. It is also known as 'chi' or 'prana' in the yoga community, tightly coiled at the spinal base. This type of yoga is especially good for treating the stress and negativity in life by elevating consciousness. The best way of doing it is by chanting and singing, followed by kriyas and mantras. It also involves warm-ups and breathing exercises and finishes up with relaxing meditation. If you want something which involves physical movement, at the same time treating you spiritually with its aura.

Vinyasa yoga: This one is also known as flow yoga and is one of the most common types of yoga and often the one recommended for beginners. The term 'Vinyasa' roughly translates to a place in a special way, referring to breath and movement and these are the exact two things that this form of yoga addresses. It is a slow and dynamic process.

Hatha yoga: This one actually means sun and moon. As the

name and its meaning suggests, this yoga type brings opposite forces together. How does it affect your body? By working on its strength, flexibility and physical and emotional energy. As many experts say, hatha yoga is using the body as a way of self-inquiry. This is another form of yoga which is recommended for beginners. Hatha yoga is a mix of six poses, pranayama and meditation.

Ashtanga yoga: This yoga involves six asanas, each in a particular order. However, the poses do not occur one after the other in a sequence. Each asana is only allowed when the person has mastered the last one. It is a flow-style yoga and is personal growth, different for each practitioner. One thing to note about Ashtanga yoga is that here, no music is involved. If you want a physical practice which is also spiritual in nature, this should be your pick.

Yin yoga: This is a slower form of yoga. The poses or asanas in this one are often held from somewhere between a minute to five minutes. One interesting thing to know about this type of yoga is that it has its roots in martial arts. Yin yoga is extremely effective at improving the body's flexibility and increasing the circulation in the joints. This particular form of yoga focuses on the lower back, thighs and on the hips by using blankets and bolsters. A major difference between yin yoga and other forms of yoga is that while the former works on connective tissues, the latter is about the major muscle issues. Yin yoga is also a great way to recover from extremely hard workouts.

Iyengar yoga: This one is named after its founder, BKS Iyengar. It is an alignment-based yoga practice, wherein many props are used, such as chairs, benches and even walls. This one is best suited for older adults and is quite static in nature. This is also less intense and is the best form of yoga for someone who has limited physical abilities or movements.

Bikram yoga: This is hot yoga, literally. The reason for this is that the temperature of the room should be at least 105 degrees with exactly 40% humidity while practicing this form of yoga. It involves two breathing exercises and 26 asanas. This yoga requires the practitioners to sweat which gives them additional flexibility to perform the asanas.

Yogic Management of Lifestyle Disorders

Basic Yogic principles that are used in the management of lifestyle disorders include the following:

Psychological reconditioning and development of appropriate attitudes such as *yama-niyama*, *chaturbhavana*, and *pratipaksha bhavanam*

Stress management through counselling, *Asanas* (postures), *kriyas* (systematic rational breath-body coordination movements), and *pranayama* (breath-energy harmonizing techniques)

Helping normalize metabolic activity through physical activity such as *Surya namaskar*, *asanas*, *kriyas*, and *pranayama*

Relaxation, visualization, and contemplative practices to induce a sense of inner calmness and well-being.

To live a healthy life, it is important to do healthy things and follow a healthy lifestyle. The modern world is facing a pandemic of lifestyle disorders that require changes to be made consciously by individuals themselves. Yoga places a great importance on a proper and healthy lifestyle whose main components are as follows

- Achar:** Yoga stresses the importance of healthy activities such as exercise and recommends asanas, pranayama, and kriyas on a regular basis. Cardiorespiratory health is one of the main by-products of such healthy activities

- ii). **Vichar:** Right thoughts and right attitude toward life is vital for well-being. A balanced state of mind is obtained by following the moral restraints and ethical observances (*Yama-niyama*). As Mahatma Gandhi said, “there is enough in this world for everyone's need but not enough for any one person's greed”
- iii). **Ahar:** Yoga emphasizes the need for a healthy, nourishing diet that has an adequate intake of fresh water along with a well-balanced intake of fresh food, green salads, sprouts, unrefined cereals, and fresh fruits. It is important to be aware of the need for a Satvik diet, prepared and served with love and affection
- iv). **Vihar:** Proper recreational activities to relax body and mind are essential for good health. This includes proper relaxation, maintaining quietude of action-speech-thoughts, and group activities, wherein one loses the sense of individuality. *Karma Yoga* is an excellent method for losing the sense of individuality and gaining a sense of universality.

Spirituality: Meaning, Signs, and Benefits

Spirituality is the belief that life exists in a dimension other than the physical, often involving a sense of connection with a higher power, nature, or humanity. It can be manifested through religion, personal reflection, or practices that foster inner growth.

Signs of Spirituality

Spirituality manifests itself in the form of deep questions, feelings of empathy and interconnectedness, a desire to find meaning beyond material possessions, and a desire to improve

the world.

Types of Spirituality

There are many different types of spirituality. Some examples of how people get in touch with their own spirituality include:

- Breathwork
- Meditation or quiet time
- New age spirituality
- Prayer
- Service to their community
- Spending time in nature
- Spiritual retreats
- Yoga

Benefits: According to research, spirituality can reduce stress, improve emotional well-being, boost optimism, and increase resilience. Prayer and meditation have been linked to improved health, reduced depression, and increased life satisfaction. In essence, spirituality nurtures the mind, body, and soul, assisting people in discovering their life's purpose, peace, and connection.

Results

The following key observations were made from the survey and literature review:

- **Yoga Practice Frequency:** Out of 20 students taken for study, only 3 students reported practicing yoga regularly. 6 students practiced occasionally, while 11 students did not engage in yoga at all.

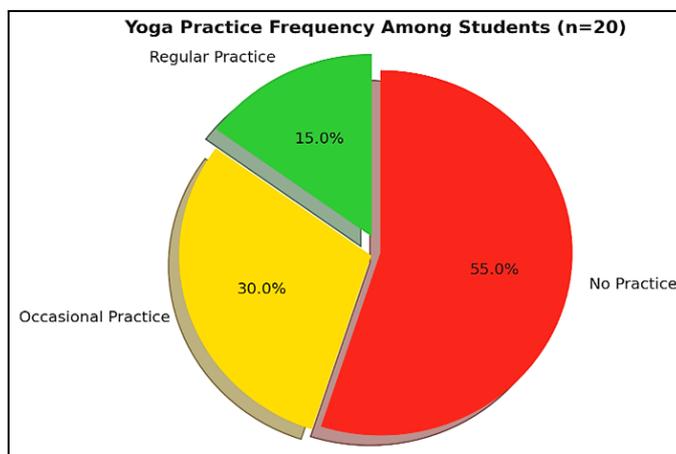


Fig 1:

- **Coping Mechanisms:** Alternative to engaging in structured wellness practices like yoga or meditation, the majority of students reported using passive or short-term coping methods such as increased screen time, social withdrawal, or irregular sleep patterns.
- **Benefits of Yoga for Practitioners:** Students who practiced yoga on a regular basis reported significant sleep quality, emotional regulation, and concentration. These students also reported having more control over their stress and mental state.
- **Psychosomatic Benefits:** Research consistently shows that yoga, particularly through pranayama (breathing techniques) and relaxation practices, provides psychosomatic benefits by reducing sympathetic nervous system overactivity and promoting relaxation. However, these benefits are underutilized among student

populations, possibly due to a lack of awareness or access.

Yoga has been shown to have a significant positive impact on: Physical health benefits include improved posture, flexibility, stamina, and metabolism.

- **Mental Well-being:** decreased anxiety and depression, increased mindfulness, and emotional stability.
- **Lifestyle Improvement:** Enhanced self-discipline, healthier food choices, better sleep hygiene, and a more structured daily routine.
- **Role of Spiritual Practices:** Spiritual components of yoga-such as meditation, mindfulness, and reflective practices- further enhanced stress resilience, emotional awareness, and inner peace. These practices fostered a deeper sense of connection and purpose

among practitioners.

Discussion

The study identifies a significant gap in awareness and application of Yoga and spirituality in the treatment of lifestyle-related disorders, particularly among young people. Despite rising stress levels, the use of such holistic practices remains low. One possible explanation is that yoga is now viewed as merely physical exercise, with many people ignoring its spiritual and philosophical depth. To effectively treat lifestyle disorders, an integrated Yoga and spirituality model is required. Encouraging people to practice not only physical Yoga (*Asanas*), but also mental and spiritual practices, can help to create a long-term and personalized health framework.

Educators, wellness coaches, and healthcare professionals should promote:

- Awareness of Yoga's full potential (body, mind, and soul).
- Access to guided sessions and spiritual workshops. Integrating these practices into educational and workplace wellness programs.

Future Scope

- **Awareness Campaigns for Holistic Yoga:** There is a need for awareness programs, particularly in educational institutions, to teach students about yoga's physical, mental, and spiritual dimensions. Yoga should be promoted as a lifestyle and coping mechanism for modern stressors, rather than just exercise.
- **Integration with Mental Health Programs:** Yoga and spiritual practices can be integrated into mental health support systems through educational and corporate wellness programs, making them more accessible and normalized among young people and the workforce.
- **Longitudinal Research:** Future research should include long-term observation and intervention to determine how consistent yoga and spiritual practice affects mental health and lifestyle disorders over time, particularly among students and young adults.
- **Policy-level Promotion:** Policymakers in the health and education sectors should promote yoga and spirituality-based lifestyle interventions as preventive measures for noncommunicable diseases and mental health issues.

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