

Chapter 17

Yoga for Psychological Wellbeing in Modern Life and Contexts

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, we will address how Yoga may contribute to psychological wellbeing. The chapter will be based on review of relevant literature in the backdrop of the theoretical framework of Self-Efficacy developed by Albert Bandura in his comprehensive ‘social cognitive theory of human motivation and learning’. Illustrations are included from our study: “Yoga to promote young people’s mental health and well-being?” First, we will address some current social tendencies that contribute to everyday stress and challenges to people’s general wellbeing. Second, we aim to have some conceptual clarification related to the concepts in our title “Yoga for psychological wellbeing”. Third, we will address how Yoga may function as a tool for self-regulation and its relationship with self-efficacy. Fourth, we will describe how Yoga is perceived as a mean to cope with stress. We will discuss how different people use Yoga to cope with stress, and how this partly relates to the role of Yoga as a tool for self-regulation.

Yoga represents the way of life which endows perfect health – physical, mental, moral and spiritual, so that what is ignoble in man is sublimated to what is most noble in him. ((Yogendra, 2013, 1988)

...the physical side is only a minor aspect of yoga which is chiefly mental and spiritual. Rev. Swami Kuvalayananda (Bhagal, 2010)

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INTRODUCTION

In this chapter we will address how Yoga may contribute to psychological wellbeing. The chapter will be based on review of relevant literature in the backdrop of the theoretical framework of Self-Efficacy developed by Albert Bandura in his comprehensive ‘social cognitive theory of human motivation and learning’. Illustrations are included from our study: “Yoga to promote young people’s mental health and well-being?”¹. First we will address some current social tendencies that contribute to everyday stress and challenges to people’s general wellbeing. Second, we aim to have some conceptual clarification related to the concepts in our title “Yoga for psychological wellbeing”. Third, we will address how Yoga may function as a tool for self-regulation and its relationship with self-efficacy. Fourth, we will describe how Yoga is perceived as a means to cope with stress. We will discuss how different people use Yoga to cope with stress, and how this partly relates to the role of Yoga as a tool for self-regulation. Finally, we will discuss how practicing Yoga is also perceived as a sanctuary or “safe place” for some people, beyond the daily life stressors.

CONTEXTUALIZATION: PRESSURES IN A GLOBALIZED WORLD

In modern life and especially in urban living, experiencing stress in everyday life is a common phenomenon by all sections of society. This may be true for both adults and young alike, although sources and reasons of stress may vary across generations, gender and based on other sociological parameters Selye (1995 & 1974) who coined the term stress, emphasized that stress had an impact on the organism exposed to the environmental stressor. Generally, stress is a subjective perception that imagined or real demands or threats are beyond your ability to cope with them. The stress response is a set of physiological responses. When we experience stress we are in a biological «alarm reaction», which means that we may react in a terms of fight, flight or freeze. Experiencing stress in the form of activation is thus a natural and healthy response. However, chronic stress is wasting energy by being in a constant alert state, something which creates health problems (Kroese, 2011).

One of the potential stressors of modern societies is the way new media technologies have been integrated in our lives, together with a more commercial and competitive society. In the digital age people are often over-stimulated due to the easy availability of online communication and social media platforms. New technological platforms and more so mobile media are double edged; they are great resources to lead a life of comfort but they also make people available to others 24/7. They are also available freely for commercial messages and for production and dissemination to the entertainment industry. Also, their own need for constant stimulation and entertainment make people more reliant on the external world than with their own “inner world”. Thus, a number of people today experience their life as quite stressful and challenging, something, which can also cause mental health problems. Yoga is a tool that can enable one to be more in contact with one’s inner world – breath, body, and mind – especially if practiced regularly.

Living in a globalized and techno-savvy world is the reality for most people in contemporary societies, in urban as well as in more rural settings. Increased globalization means opening up borders, and increased access and opportunities for people. However, globalization also makes a number of people more vulnerable. The development and distribution of media technologies like mobile phones and access to Internet through smart phones, tablets, smart TV and gaming consoles increase the availability of entertaining content and social media platforms. Thus, people worldwide are frequently exposed to

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