


# Chapter 11

## Yoga for Mental Health Disorders: Research and Practice

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter is divided into four subsections: the first section of the chapter provides an update on current evidence for yoga therapy in common mental health disorders, the second section provides brief overview on neurophysiological abnormalities in psychiatric disorders and their relationship with psychological stress, the third section deals with summary of evidence for neurophysiological effects of yoga in mental health disorders, and the last section emphasizes on practical aspects of yoga therapy with details of clinically useful yoga practices for common mental health disorders. The mental health disorders covered in this chapter include depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, child and adolescent psychiatric disorders, substance use disorders, and geriatric psychiatric disorders.*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Psychiatric disorders are common and cause significant disability. As per the recent National Mental Health Survey, the overall weighted prevalence of mental morbidity was 10.6 percent for current and 13.7 percent for a lifetime (Murthy et al., 2017). Anxiety and depressive disorders are two of the most prevalent mental health disorders affecting the general population, with a one-year prevalence of 10-20 percent. As per the US epidemiological survey, anxiety disorders are more common than depressive disorders with a lifetime prevalence of 28.8 percent. Severe mental disorders include Schizophrenia, Major Depressive Disorder, Bipolar Affective Disorder, and Substance use disorders.

Usually, psychiatric disorders tend to have a chronic course and considerably affect social, occupational, and personal functioning and increase health care costs. Though pharmacotherapy and psychotherapy form the mainstay of treatment, a significant proportion of patients seek traditional medicine either due to lack of desired response to conventional treatment, the stigma associated with such treatments, or side-effects of medications. This has led to patients employing traditional treatment modalities that could be self-administered, cost-effective, and enhance the sense of self-reliance.

Yoga is a way of life that includes mental, physical, and spiritual attributes. According to Indian philosophy, Yoga has been defined as '*Chitta Vritti Nirodhah*' (*Patanjali Yoga Sutras*, Chapter 1, Verse 2), a technique to quiet the mind or restrain the modifications of the mind (Iyengar, 1993). Yoga's major mental health benefits are to calm the mind, enhance concentration, encourage self-acceptance, and reduce stress and anxiety. It has proven benefits in achieving, preserving, and promoting mental health (Balasubramaniam et al., 2013). Yoga-based interventions have claimed to be effective in treating mental health disorders, but the mechanisms involved in the treatment process are not fully understood. In the beginning, yoga research was limited only to investigations into the reduction of stress-related variables and improvement in cardiorespiratory health. The inclusion of new physiological and psychological parameters has improved the research platform to carry out adequate research in the field of mental disorders. The current chapter aims to widen the understanding of yoga in terms of research and practice in mental health disorders.

## **YOGA THERAPY FOR PSYCHIATRIC DISORDERS: CURRENT EVIDENCE**

### **Depression**

A depressive episode is characterized by feeling pervasively sad, having decreased interest in activities, depressive cognitions, death wishes, suicidal thoughts, ideas of guilt, decreased concentration/memory/self-confidence/sleep, and appetite. In some cases, sleep and appetite may also be increased. In the past few years, there has been an increased interest in the use of yoga for the management of depressive disorders. In one of the earliest Randomized Controlled Trials (RCT), Sudarshan Kriya Yoga was found to be comparable to anti-depressant medications as a sole treatment in major depression (Janakiramaiah et al., 2000). In another study, yoga produced clinical improvement in depression comparable to medications, without significant adverse effects (Naveen et al., 2013). Yoga has been found to be effective even when used as a stand-alone treatment for mild to moderate depressive episodes. A recent study using yoga as a mono-therapy for depressed patients found that the effect size in reducing depression was large (Prathikanti et al., 2017). In another recent RCT, Iyengar yoga was tested for its impact on suicidal ideations

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