

Executive summary
MSc Occupational Psychology
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An investigation of Bikram Hatha Yoga and other yoga techniques for reducing stress at work

This study examined the relationship between general well-being and techniques such as Bikram Hatha Yoga, other kinds of Hatha yoga, and other forms of physical exercises practised by working people in order to overcome the daily demands which lead to stress. While some beneficial effects of Hatha yoga on mental health have previously been documented there has been no study undertaken between general well-being in workers and Bikram Hatha yoga. Bikram Hatha Yoga, which started in 1978, differs considerably from other types of Hatha Yoga. It is a new westernised evolution of yoga and is popular in many countries worldwide. The programme consists of 26 (asanas) positions and two breathing exercises. It is implemented in a 42°C temperature room. The whole series takes 90 minutes and only teachers certified by Mr. Bikram Choudhury have the legal right to teach this programme.

The information was collected by sending an on-line questionnaire to the following organisations: 361 Bikram yoga studios in countries where English was the first language, 461 yoga teachers from the British Wheel of Yoga in the UK and other yoga institutions in the USA, and 50 contacts in organisations in the UK, the USA and Dominican Republic.

The first section **of the questionnaire** measured two dimensions of general well-being from Cox, Thirlaway, Gotts and Cox's (1983) general well-being questionnaire (GWBQ), which is formed by two factors: GWF1 is defined by assumptions relating to tiredness, emotional fluctuation, and cognitive confusion, named "wornout". Sample questions here were "Over the last six months, how often have you become easily bored?" and "Over the last six months, how often have you had to clear your throat for no apparent reason?". The second factor (GWF2) was defined by symptoms relating to worry and fear, tension and physical signs of anxiety, named "uptight and tense". Sample questions on this scale were "Over the last six months, how often have you been bothered by your heart thumping?" and "Over the last six months, how often have you been scared when alone?". The second section asked participants about their participation in different types of Hatha yoga (including Bikram yoga) and other types of physical activity and the last section asked about their age, gender and time in job occupation.

Findings

Two hundred and fifty-two participants who were currently in employment responded to the survey. It appears that those who are practising Bikram Hatha yoga and other kinds of Hatha yoga for a longer period of time (six months or more) are reporting better levels of well-being "wornout" than

those practising for shorter period of time (less than six months). *It was also observed that persons who were practising other kinds of hatha yoga six months or more reported significantly lower "uptight" scores than those who were practising other kinds of hatha yoga for less than six months.*

The results of this study also indicated that those who had never practised Bikram hatha yoga and other kinds of hatha yoga reported significantly lower levels of stress compared to those who had practiced these forms of yoga for less than six months. It appears that those who are practising some form of physical exercise for a short period time (less than six months) are experiencing higher levels of stress compared to those who do not practice physical exercise. It is important to observe that there are other kind of activities that can enhance worker's well-being, for example: listening to favourite music, eating certain kind of food (e.g. chocolate), having good environment at home and at work, just to name a few.

Discussion:

These findings are relatively consistent with the academic literature that Hatha yoga in general has shown to help some individuals to overcome the symptoms of the demands in their workplace and personal lives.

In this study it was found that those who practice Bikram and other kinds of Hatha yoga for more than 6 months had better levels of well-being than those who practice for less than 6 months. This shows that physical exercise, no matter what kind, may help the individual maintain their well-being as long as they practise in a regular and constant basis.

The results also showed that people who did not practice any exercise had high well-being levels. The literature explains that there are other activities apart from physical exercises, such as listening to music, or doing activities that bring pleasure to body and mind that induces the making of "endorphins", which is called one of the hormones of happiness.

In conclusion the information gathered in this survey shows association with a better sense of well-being and the two kinds of yoga. The practice of Bikram Hatha yoga is related to tiredness, emotional fluctuation, and cognitive confusion. Whereas, other kind of Hatha yoga can enhance symptoms related to worry and fear, tension and physical signs of anxiety. These findings are encouraging but cannot infer cause and effect. A longitudinal randomised control study is recommended to test these relationships more rigorously.

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