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Intervention of yoga in dealing with stress and anxiety in children



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Introduction: The number of children suffering from stress and anxiety in Malaysia is on the rise. Evidence shows that mind-body therapies such as mindfulness therapy, biofeedback, deep breathing exercises, meditation and yoga have been practiced in many other countries to reduce and/or manage the psychological effects of stress and anxiety. The purpose of this review is to look at the intervention of yoga as a meditative movement practice in helping children manage stress and anxiety.

Methodology: Articles were retrieved using a combination of databases including MEDLINE, PsycINFO and PubMed. Not only peer-reviewed articles, but also those written in English language were included in this review. All studies reviewed had incorporated some form of meditative movement exercise. The intervention encompassed asanas (postures), pranayama (expansion of life force), pratyahara (withdrawal of senses), dharana (concentration) and dhyana (meditation) which are the different paths in yoga. A total of eight articles met the inclusion criteria and were reviewed.

Findings: The findings of this review reveal that the practice of yoga has brought about amongst other things improvement in managing and reducing stress and anxiety. It appears that the restorative asanas, shavasana (corpse pose), and pranayama lull one into a state of pratyahara, which enables downtime for the nervous system.

Conclusion: Despite the limitations in most, if not all of the studies reviewed in terms of heterogeneity and sample size, intervention of yoga appears to be an effective modality in helping children cope with stress and anxiety. While more rigorous research into the assessment of psychosocial and educational outcomes in response to therapeutic yoga is necessary, schools in Malaysia should seriously consider incorporating yoga as part of the physical education curriculum for the benefits of the students.

Biography

Chandra Nanthakumar is a certified Yoga Instructor and Therapist, and she has received her Classical Yoga training at the Malaysian Association of Yoga Instructors. She specializes in anti-aging yoga, pregnancy yoga, pranayama (breathing techniques), and dhyana (meditation techniques). Her Doctorate is in the field of Natural Health Sciences specializing in Yoga Therapy. She has presented papers at international conferences; the most recent one was at the Integrative Medicine Meeting in Germany in 2016 where she presented a paper on the intervention of meditative movement in the treatment of breast cancer. Being an Advocate of Natural Healing Methodology, she conducts Hatha Yoga classes and workshops not only at the university she is attached to, but also for various organizations to help teenagers and adults cope with stress, anxiety and weighty issues. She strongly believes that absorption of knowledge takes place best when the mind and body are calm, clear and centered.

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