

Building self-reliance on work related stress levels and its management – A Review

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Abstract

Background: Stress and mental health have gained traction in the recent years as significant factors that influence productivity and overall performance of employees. This review aims to summarise current knowledge of yoga, spiritual practises, counselling and other forms of stress management techniques and their positive effects on the resilience and all-inclusive well-being of individuals through the means of a literature review. **Methods:** The goal of the study, which predominantly is a literature review, is to look at the role of holistic meditative practise, which includes research that looked into the role of yoga-based breathing exercises, Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), audio therapy, therapeutic writing and other spiritual meditative exercises. From July 2016 to the present, the following databases were scoured for studies on the effects of these stress management techniques on mental health: MEDLINE, PsychINFO, PubMed, Indian Council of Medical Research, and Cochrane. Other published works were found by scanning the reference lists of pertinent papers. **Result:** It is clear by reviewing the literature presented that yogic practices, spiritual meditative practices, counselling therapy all play a major role in the reduction of stress and ameliorating the effects of day-to-day pressures of a corporate world. **Conclusion:** Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) can be employed in organisations for reduction in employee stress levels and can even be used to increase their productivity and overall performance.

Keywords: Audio therapy, breathing exercises, corporate world, counselling, MBCT, meditation, yog.

INTRODUCTION

Yoga is an ancient Indian discipline that focuses on the integration of the mind, body, and spirit via the practise of physical movements, meditation, and breathing exercises. Many diverse schools of yoga have arisen throughout the course of its long history, each emphasising a different aspect of the practise. Regardless of their differing beliefs

and exercise combinations, they all share the common notion of integrating the mind and body. Yoga's rise to prominence in Western culture began in the late twentieth century. Despite the fact that the earliest scientific research on yoga date from the 1950s, there has been an exponential growth in publications since about the start of this century. (1)

Certainly, the medical world has paid close attention to the practise of engaging the mind and body through meditation, breathing, and physical poses, and yoga has been extensively researched for its potential benefits on physical and mental health outcomes. Yoga practise has been linked to improvements in diabetes, (2) cardiovascular function, (3) and musculoskeletal disorders (4) in systematic and meta-analytic evaluations of randomised control trials. There is also substantial evidence that yoga practise is good to mental health, including anxiety, (5) stress, (6) depression, (7) and overall mental wellness (8). Yoga has typically been examined as an additional therapy in trials including adults and older adults, many of whom have clinical conditions. A recent study found moderate impact sizes for attention, processing speed, and executive function assessments in trials done with adult populations, indicating that yoga has acute and therapeutic effects on cognition. Yoga practise allows the practitioner to move into various physical postures in a controlled manner, focusing first on relaxing their body, breathing regularly, and increasing awareness of their body sensations and thoughts in their head. Yoga's breathing (pranayama) and meditation activities, in addition to the physical advantages of gradually completing the postures, are used to calm and focus the mind and build greater self-awareness. (9)

It's true that happy employees are more productive. When the relationship between work performance and psychological well-being was investigated, mental health was found to be a substantial predictor. Depression, anxiety, and exhaustion were found to be negatively connected to work performance through the analysis of various research, while life satisfaction was positively related to work performance. According to those studies, work performance is likely harmed when poor mental health leads to cognitive deficiencies (e.g., memory issues, learning, and executive functioning) that are commonly required at work. Work productivity may be jeopardised if mental wellness is neglected. Others may be unaware of a person's mental health concerns, making it even more difficult for employees to

receive help or interventions in the workplace. (10) There comes the role of therapists and counsellors, who employ a variety of techniques to assist people in coping with stress in a healthy manner. For example, cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) is a popular stress treatment option. CBT can aid in the modification of negative cognitive patterns that arise as a result of stress. It is frequently used to assist people in developing new ways of thinking about stressful experiences. These new ways of thinking may aid in reducing the stressor's impact. (11)

Stress has been defined in a variety of ways, causing confusion and misunderstanding. In the literature, there have been many different perspectives on stress, as well as a general lack of agreement on a single definition and interpretation. According to Williams and Cooper, stress is the result of a process in which an individual feels the challenges and demands of life, job, or family stresses. (12) Stress is defined as "a state manifested by a distinct syndrome that consists of all the non-specifically caused changes within a biological system," according to Selye's biochemical model of stress. (13) Palmer described stress as an individual's psychological, physiological, and behavioural response to a perceived lack of balance between the demands placed on them and their ability to meet those expectations, which leads to ill-health over time. (14) Dua defined stress as a reaction to stressful situations, describing stress as an occurrence that lays expectations on an individual and the individual's realisation that he or she is unable to meet those demands properly. (15) Physical, emotional, and situational stress are all sources of stress, according to Donovan and Kleiner. They defined physical stress as stress produced by factors such as overwork, lack of sleep, and a bad diet. They explained that mental stress is caused by an individual's mental state of mind, which includes their hopes, anxieties, and regrets from day-to-day existence. They defined situational stress as stress resulting from an individual's interactions with the outside world, such as their function as spouse, father, wife, or mother, as well as interactions

with contemporary life's trappings like cars and computers. (16)

Audio therapy has emerged as one of the more promising areas of fostering self-reliance when it comes to employees experiencing workplace stress as we continue to investigate alternative therapy modalities. Audio treatments consist of a collection of audio programmes that guide you through a step-by-step approach to assist you relieve stress. These sessions, which last anywhere from 5 to 45 minutes, are centred on cognitive therapy and meditation. They generally concentrate on breathing, physical tension, invigorating your soul, encouraging positive ideas, and restoring the mind-body equilibrium. As a result, listening to a sonata can help us relax and improve our mood. After a long day at work, audio or music can have a significant impact on both our emotions and our bodies. Upbeat music, for example, might make us feel more positive about life, while slower music can help us relax our minds and muscles. Our mental responses to particular noises and vibrations can have a positive impact on our physical, emotional, and mental wellbeing. So, let's have a look at a few additional ways that these audio courses might help us relax. (17)

One of the most intrinsic methods to cope with the stresses of everyday life is to keep a journal. It usually entails keeping a diary or notebook in which you explore your ideas and feelings about events in your life. There are various options for doing so. When it comes to stress management and self-exploration, journaling works best when done on a regular basis, but when the practise is focused on

thankfulness or emotional processing, even infrequent journaling can be beneficial.

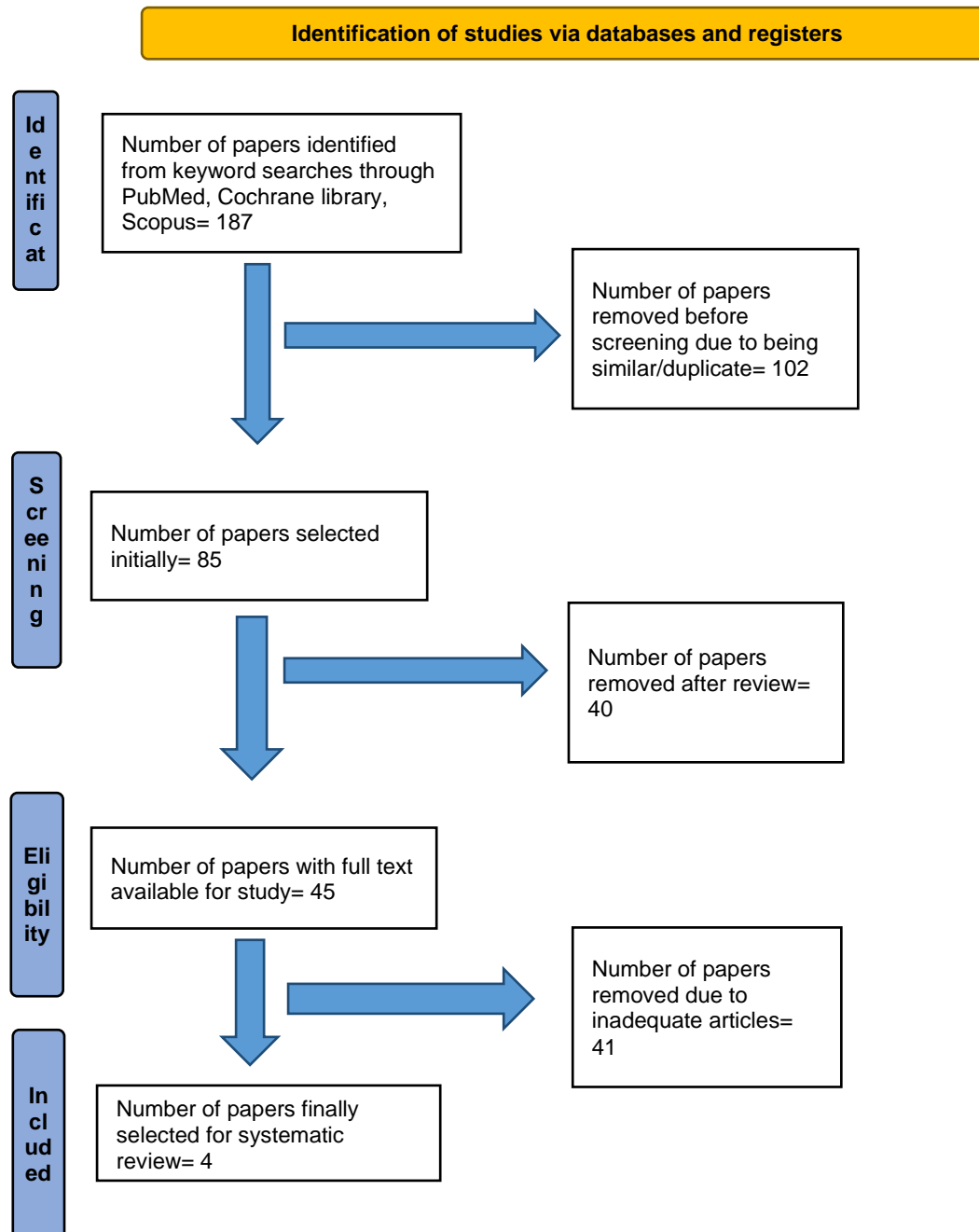
Writing in detail about feelings and thoughts connected to stressful events, as one would discuss themes in therapy, and brainstorming solutions is one of the most effective ways to reduce stress using journaling, although there are various alternative ways to practise journaling.

Methods

The goal of this literature review, is to look at the role of holistic stress management techniques, which includes research that looked into the role of yoga-based breathing exercises, audio therapy, therapeutic writing practices, and effects of counselling. From July 2016 to the present the following databases were scoured for studies on the effects of yoga on brain health: MEDLINE, Psych INFO, PubMed, Indian Council of Medical Research, and Cochrane. Other published works were found by scanning the reference lists of pertinent papers.

There was a total of 187 documents discovered after the extensive search. Following that, 102 publications that were similar/duplicate articles were eliminated, which resultantly made 85 separate papers available initially. The abstracts and titles of submissions were then reviewed, and a further 79 papers were eliminated. Finally, 4 papers that completely met the inclusion and exclusion criteria were chosen, which included study articles and randomised control trials. (Figure 1)

Figure 1: Flow chart representing the number of articles screened and evaluated



Only those studies that met certain criteria, such as papers that reflected the use of these aforementioned techniques such as Audio therapy, breathing exercises, corporate world, counselling, MBCT, meditation, yoga in stress management, were chosen. Shortlisted studies also included topics in which resilience building to stress was observed in the study, as well as papers that were exclusively published in English. We also performed Search engine optimization (SEO) using keywords relevant to the topic of our study across online databases in order to scour for the relevant articles. On the other hand, a major exclusion criterion included the effect of stress management techniques in the treatment of depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), or other anomalies that deviated from the target study topic. Also, medical therapies that included usage of traditional treatment modalities for managing stress-related symptoms/mental health (for

example-usage of antidepressants) were excluded since the aim for this review was to analyse and scrutinise alternative therapies/holistic approaches that could be utilised in a corporate environment with respect to stress management and overall well-being of individuals. The relevant research in this area appears to be quite sparse, particularly more recent studies that focus on the relationship between different modalities and their role in stress reduction/management in the workplace. Literature searches using keywords from various databases didn't reveal a lot of recent studies that could be related to the topic that this review was focusing on, but nonetheless the available studies of interest did have a substantial amount of text which correlated the effect of these techniques on reduction in stress and building a holistic approach for pressure management and building self-reliance with respect to a corporate setting. (Table 1)

Table 1: *Review of articles on stress management techniques.*

Author and year of study	Sample size	Stress management technique	Type of study	Group category type and controls	Results
Santaella et al (2019) ⁽²⁵⁾	40 female adults; age group 0-40 yrs	Hatha yoga	Cross-sectional study	8 and a half years of mindfulness meditative practice 2 times a week	Noticeable improvement in medial prefrontal cortex activity thereby enhancing cognition against no particular enhancement in the control group
Fiamma Cavallero et al (2021) ⁽¹⁶⁾	27 healthy young adults; age group >18 yrs	Audio therapy using transcranial magnetic stimulation technique (TMS)	Intervention study	No prior experience of audio therapy or any other practice prior to 6-7 months of the study	Decreased pressure, anxiety, or aggravation while doing meditation exercises while receiving TMS.
Catherine, Patrick et al (2021) ⁽¹⁰⁾	9 healthy adults; average median age of sample size= 35 yrs	Effect of creative writing on mental health	Cross-sectional study	4 weeks of continuous creative writing sessions under the auspices of a clinical psychologist	Significant benefits to the processing of emotional difficulty and positive effect on the mood and mental well-being of participants
Mei Tang et al (2020) ⁽¹⁹⁾	25 adults; mean age= 32 years	Effect of counselling on career and mental health	Cross-sectional study	Individuals were counselled by a professional counsellor over a period of 4 weeks	All the participants reported positive changes in their overall mental state after the counselling period

Results

According to investigations, numerous pressures that evolved during pandemic outbreaks have long-lasting impacts, meaning that they persist even after the pandemic has passed, and COVID-19 is still present. (18) As a result, it is impossible to adequately evaluate its effects on people's mental health after it has vanished. However, based on current studies on COVID-19 and prior pandemics and epidemics such as SARS, some predictions can be made about the potential stressors post-COVID-19 that may negatively affect executives' mental health. In this example, it appears that stigma and work uncertainty, in addition to posttraumatic stress disorder associated to the recovery from a life-threatening physical illness, may have a long-term effect after COVID-19.

Meditation techniques have been classified into two types: those that emphasise concentration, such as transcendental meditation (TM) and other mantra-based meditation programmes, and those that emphasise "mindfulness," such as mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) and mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT). This difference, however, is extremely simplistic, and it may not effectively distinguish the impacts of the techniques or the specific abilities they teach. Although the goal of attention may differ, both versions appear to require concentration or concentrated attention at some point during the training. Both prescribe a mental activity, or non-activity (which some may consider an activity), in conjunction with focused concentration. Both appear to indicate a mind-set or intention related to these behaviours. Both kinds appear to be dynamic as well. (19)

Discussion

Work demands and changes in work status, on the other hand, can affect both mental and physical health. In an annual study of stress, the American Psychological Association stated that in 2020, 64 percent of individuals cited employment as a significant source of stress. Toxic work environments, negative workloads,

isolation, role conflict, role ambiguity, lack of autonomy, career development barriers, difficult relationships with administrators and/or co-workers, managerial bullying, and harassment are all examples of workplace stressors in the twenty-first century. and the working environment. (20, 21)

Journaling is a feasible choice for the disabled, unlike more physical stress management strategies like yoga or exercise. And, while some people prefer to use a computer, journaling simply requires a pen and paper, making it less expensive than approaches like biofeedback or yoga, which involve the use of a class, book, teacher, or therapist. Journaling, however, does not ease stress in the body like progressive muscle relaxation, guided imagery, and other physical and meditative therapies. It is, however, a useful practise for stress relief, self-awareness, and emotional healing. (22) The results of the remaining RCTs and the literature evaluation did not provide enough data to draw any conclusions about the effectiveness of mindfulness meditation programmes. In addition, no evidence for any specific form of injury was discovered in the research included in this analysis. (23)

It is critical to remember the conceptual meanings of the various levels of evidence strength. High evidence strength suggests that the evidence accurately reflects the genuine effect, and more study is likely to modify the scenarios of effect estimations. As the name implies, moderate strength of evidence provides moderate confidence that the evidence accurately reflects the underlying effect, yet subsequent research may modify the status of the evidence, which may be under scrutiny at the present moment. (24)

Due to the aforementioned factors, as well as other worries, people frequently reach a point of crisis before seeking help. Anyone, whether they are a high-ranking person or not, will have reservations and anxiety about seeking help for a mental health problem. As a result, it's critical that individuals recognise the signs and symptoms of mental illness and addiction so that they may intervene early and get the support they need. Any changes in their

enthusiasm, look, performance, mood, punctuality, and/or absence should be noted by employees themselves, because they, being within the position that they are, can analyse any fluctuations that they'll encounter in their day-to-day functioning as a result of any particular stress or ailment plaguing them. Moreover, trustees and other members of the company ought to have guidelines and procedures in place to be identified as part of signs and symptoms of mental health issues or addiction that do not admonish the individual suffering from a mental health issue, but rather allow them to seek help and return to work as a higher standard of themselves, thereby assisting the corporation in becoming more successful. (20, 25)

Conclusion

This assessment of the literature uncovers intriguing preliminary evidence that audio therapy, counselling, meditation, writing and yoga- all can improve mental health, especially amongst people employed in the corporate sector since they are the individuals subjected to one of the highest stress levels of any working sector that contributes significantly to the GDP of a nation. According to research, meditation techniques may affect brain connections and activity when performing cognitive activities. As a result, behavioural therapies such as meditation could help to slow down age-related and neurodegenerative losses. To determine the breadth and scope of neurobiological changes, systematic randomised trials of yoga and comparisons to other exercise-based therapies are required. As the world progresses toward advancing the advantages of alternative therapeutic practices for reduction in stress levels, it is hoped that this review can provide the preliminary groundwork for researchers to identify critical brain networks that directly correlate with a reduction in stress levels and regions of interest.

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