

Yognidra, old age and satisfaction towards life: an empirical study

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Abstract

To see the effect of Yognidra on the aged with respect to satisfaction in life, 500 aged people (age 70 to 75 Years) from different professions were incidentally (and conveniently) selected from Bhagalpur town. Subsequently, 250 subjects were randomly assigned to Experimental group and the rest (N=250) were subjected to Control group. The Volunteers from both the groups belonged to the middle income group, urban residents, males and graduates. The Life Satisfaction Scale consisting of 20 items was utilized for the measurement of the dependent variable. Swami Satyananda's technique of Yognidra was used to discern its effect on the dependent variable. The Two Group pre-test post-test design was effected. It was hypothesized that on account of no intervention (i.e. no practice of Yognidra) to the Control group as opposed to six months of intervention for the Experimental group the two groups will differ significantly in terms of sense of satisfaction in life. True to expectation (and the hypothesis) and common observation, as also relevant research findings, the Experimental group expressed significantly greater degree of satisfaction in life than their counterpart who were subjected to no experimental treatment. The reasons behind the findings have been discussed in the light of the Hindu worldview and the social and cultural realities of the contemporary Indian social life.

Key words: Yoga, Old age, Life satisfaction

Article Received: 19-05-2015, Revised: 27-05-2015, Accepted: 13-07-2015

Conflict of interest: None declared

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International Journal of Science and Consciousness (IJSC): a Bio-Psycho-Spiritual approach

Published by: Foundation for Science, Spirituality & Consciousness, Uttarakhand, India

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Introduction:

Aging is natural process of life- primarily a biological one. However, there are apparent cognitive changes, some positive but mostly negative. There may be cross-cultural differences in this respect but globally it has been observed, empirically and otherwise, that in the last phases of life - '*Vanprastha*' and '*Sanyasa*' according to Hindu scheme of things- the feeling of satisfaction towards life declines considerably. So to say, the main problem with the aged all over the world is the reduction of the sense of satisfaction towards life. Life satisfaction is important aspect of personality which is closely related to psychological well-being. Veenhoven (1991) defines life satisfaction as the degree of how favorably a person judges one's life and how happy he or she is leading his life. It consists of affective and cognitive components constituting and overall appraisal of life. It is also indicative of social and personal satisfaction as well as general happiness. It manifests itself in self confidence, sociability and feeling of competence. Life satisfaction refers to retrospective evaluation of enjoying life through self judgment. It is evaluated on the basis of past experiences, present situation and future expectation. Thus, a person with adequate feeling of life satisfaction is thought to have better adjustment with the situations of life.

In the recent study conducted on the Indian sample Ojha and Pramanick (2010) found that life satisfaction decreases with age and that it is the lowest in the old age and highest in the young age. Others, in the past, too have indicated that higher the age lower the life satisfaction (Lakshminarayan, 1990; Das and Satsangi, 2007). One of the reasons behind this is the lower level of activity in the aged. Bromley (1974) albeit in a different socio-cultural setting, found that not many people in the old age consider it as the most gratifying phase of life. Shin and Johnson (1978) have defined this feeling as a "global assessment of

person's quality of life according to his own chosen criteria". Diener (2000), Diener and Sufi (2000), Lucas and Donnellan (2007) have also stressed the subjective side of life satisfaction. The concept of subjective wellbeing is also said to have three components - positive affect, negative affect and life satisfaction (Andrews and Withey, 1976; Campbell, Converse and Rogers, 1976; Diener, 1984). Positive affects consist of pleasant emotions or feelings such as joy and happiness, whereas negative affects consist of unpleasant feelings and emotions such as fear of segregation, pessimism and the like. Life satisfaction refers to cognitive judgment process - a global assessment of one's life as a whole (Diener, 1984). Yognidra, contrary to what the name suggests, is not a sleep at all. Rather, it is a state between wakefulness and sleep, often referred to as 'Hypnogogic State' especially by Freudian psychoanalysts. Yognidra has its origin in the Tantras, wherein the technique of '*Nyasa*' is basic to Tantric ritual practices. In modern times Swami Satyanand (1976) popularized this yogic therapeutic method of complete physical, mental and spiritual relaxation. In this, rotation of consciousness in the entire body is practiced gradually and slowly. This prepares the mind for deeper relaxation. The basic idea is to gain awareness for all parts of the body so that there is enhanced inclination towards the relaxation process. It is believed, in Yoga, that suffering is the result of excessive identification with the body and the ensuing sensation. Yoganidra aims to liberate a person from this type of identification and thereby elevate the self to higher levels of consciousness so that the pranic, physical and spiritual realms of existence are actualized.

That Yognidra is beneficial for human beings has been empirically confirmed by a number of investigations. Fortini, Apro, Bugnon, Maggi & Vonga, (1980) have deduced that Yognidra is helpful in many ways for the elderly people as there is a tendency amongst them to transfer

their psychological difficulties into physical symptoms and vice versa. Bhushan and Bhushan (2008) have found that the practice of Yognidra helps in the transformation of personality. Ghosh (2001) and Nillson (1997) have also come to the conclusion that the systematic and regular practice of Yognidra helps in the increase of alpha waves in the brain resulting in calm and quietitude. Dunn (1980) is of the view that relaxation techniques invariably reduce muscle tension, the result of which is the onset of a corresponding positive frame of mind. Bhushan and Sinha (2001) have also concluded that the practice of Yognidra is beneficial for minimization of negative traits of personality.

Keeping in mind the objective of the study the following hypothesis were framed for verification:

1. That, there will be no significant difference between the Experimental and Control groups in the pre-phase with respect to life satisfaction scores.
2. That, there will be significant difference between the Experimental and Control groups in the post-phase with respect to life satisfaction scores.
3. That, there will be no significant difference between the Control group in the pre and post-phases with respect to life satisfaction scores.
4. That, there will be significant difference in scores of pre and post phases of the Experimental group with respect to life satisfaction scores.

Method of Study:

Sample:

500 aged persons (between 70 to 75 years) from different walks of life comprised of the sample (from Bhagalpur town only). 250 Subjects for both Experimental and the Control groups were randomly chosen. Care was taken to omit such persons from the sample who knew about yoga and were already practicing Yoga for some time. The Subjects were from the middle income group, urban residents, males and graduates.

Design:

To obtain realistic and authentic result the popular Classical Experimental Design was used. The pre-test post-test strategy with one experimental and one control group ensured comparability of the findings. The Control group helped in getting rid of the effect of testing sensitivity. It is alleged, in the empirical study approach, that testing sensitivity is a result of repeated measurement of dependent variable (life satisfaction in the present case). Thus, it has to be kept constant to ensure cancellation of its effect. The pre-testing often influences the scores of the subsequent one on account of familiarity, practice or any response set. Consequently, the effect of test sensitivity can easily be assessed on the basis of the score obtained by the control group. Thus, for findings out the difference, if any, owing to the practice of Yognidra the Experimental group, only, was exposed to experimental treatment. The control group, on the other hand, on account of obvious reasons enumerated above, was allowed to continue with their normal daily activities. Nevertheless, subjects from the Control group were tested and retested on their life satisfaction responses as many times as the subjects from the Experimental group.

Assessments:

The life satisfaction Scale developed by Ojha (2005) was used for accessing the changes in dependent variable. The scale has 20 items of equal number of positive and negative items. There are two response categories-Agree and Disagree. The items are indicative of retrospective evaluation of satisfaction in life. The split half and test-retest reliabilities of the scale have been found to be adequate, i.e. 0.75 for the former and 0.68 for the latter. An additional feature of the scale is that it caters to the 'Emic' requirement of the cultural context of the study.

Intervention:

Yognidra:

Traditionally, Yognidra is practiced in *Shavasana* (corpse pose). The subject has to follow the instructions of instructor (Qualified in Yoga) or use a pre-recorded C.D. or Cassette of yoganidra. The complete practice of yognidra has several sessions. In the first the subject is instructed to concentrate his attention to different parts of body one by one and try to achieve maximum awareness so that complete physical relaxation is achieved. Then he is mentally made to prepare for the awakening of the sensations of pairs of opposites such as heavy-light, hot-cold etc. Finally, the practitioner is told to visualize some images and symbols of abstract nature. The following instructions with some variations are normally given for the practice of Yognidra:

“Lie down in *Shavasana*, Keep the head in the line of the body. Keep your feet apart and your arms by the side of your body with the palms turned skyward. Be comfortable. There should not be any movement in the body. Your eyes ought to be closed during the entire session of the practice.

Now, Promise yourself thrice that “I shall not sleep but remain awake”. Breathing deeply feel as if the entire body is completely relaxed. Now exhale with the feeling that you are being freed from all your worries. Again, be aware of your physical disposition and try to relax completely. Now feel as if the breath is moving between the navel and the throat. Avoid breathing deep and long. Once again repeat with full awareness and feeling the resolve taken in the beginning three times “I shall not sleep but remain awake”. Now, start rotating your awareness to all parts of your body one by one slowly and gradually. At the same time keep repeating mentally the name of all the parts and try to achieve complete relaxation. Be completely alert. Now, firstly the right side of the body-right thumb, index finger, middle finger, little finger, palm, back of the right hand, wrist, elbow, shoulder, armpit, waist, thigh, knee, calf, muscle, ankle, heel, sole, toe, upper side of the foot.

Now the same process is to be repeated for the left side of the body. Then bring the awareness to the backside of the body. Now shift your awareness to the upper portion-head, forehead, temples, eyebrows, eyelid, ears, eyes, cheeks, nose, tip of the nose, chin, lips, throat, right chest, left chest, navel, abdomen and the entire front side of the body. Now focus your awareness to the entire right leg, the left leg, both legs, the entire right arm, the left arm, both the arms.

Now, again take the resolve “I am awake, I shall not sleep’ three times. Now divert your awareness to meeting points of your body touching the floor. Now, visualize your body from outside, as if it is corpse lying on the floor. Now imagine looking at a deep, dark well. Look inside it. Imagine also bucket in the well then pulling it out of the deep, dark well. Now ask yourself ‘Am I thinking rightly? That is, I am thinking of that which I am to think? Cease this process of thinking but simultaneously be aware of process of thinking. Become a witness of your thinking.

Now, try to be aware of the feelings of lightness and heaviness one by one. Think that your body is as light as cotton. Now, the awareness of heaviness. Think as if your body is as heavy as a stone boulder. Next, the awareness towards the sensations of cold and hot. Feel as if your body is as hot as the fire. Next, feel the sensation of cold by thinking of your body as ice. Now, the sensations of pain and pleasure. Think of some moments in life that have given you immense pleasure. Now, think of the painful events of your life. Try to relive the moment. Now try to visualize some images arousing feelings and emotions within you. Visualize a river flowing gently, a boat, birds swimming in the river. A garden, flowers, green trees laden with fruits of your choice, mango, papaya, guava, coconut. Sun rising above the horizon in the East. Sunset in the West, cloud, rain, paddy field, cattle’s grazing.

Now concentrate on your awareness. Try witnessing your own awareness. For the time

being forget about your body, your mind and the senses emanating from within. Be only aware of your awareness only. Look inside of yourself. Try to be aware of the fact that you are aware of yourself, looking within. Now focus your awareness to the centre of your forehead, between the two eyes. Visualize a sparking light at that point. Focus deeply. You will see a golden egg at the centre of the glittering flame of light.

Now once again take the resolve mentally, "I shall not sleep. I shall be awake for the entire period of this practice". Repeat this resolve three times, as previously.

Now, the last part of the session. Try to achieve complete relaxation. Now shift your focus outside. Be aware of your breathing. Now focus on the surrounding, the room, the things and people around. While keeping your eyes closed lie down for some time. Move your body freely, stretch it. Now if you feel that you are totally awake, rise slowly and gradually. Sit. Open your eyes slowly.

Strategy of study:

As the present study involved the practice of Yognidra, as an independent variable, proper care was taken initially to ensure the right atmosphere for the treatment condition (i.e. for the experimental group). As such, the chosen subjects were asked to follow certain specific instructions before starting practicing Yognidra. Firstly, they were told to choose a place for this purpose which was peaceful and quiet and also free from disturbances and pollutions. Secondly, a clean blanket preferably six feet long and three feet wide was to be used. Thirdly, a reliable person was to assist, if required, as helper or accomplice in playing the C.D / Cassette for the subject for the entire duration of the study. Lastly, the practice of Yognidra was to be done strictly and sincerely with full commitment in accordance with the method as outlined in the texts or as orally conveyed to by the researcher.

The chosen subjects were given introductory lectures and demonstration on the theory and practice of Yognidra for three days before the commencement of the actual sessions.

The Life Satisfaction scale was administered to both the Experimental and Control groups in the pre and post phases of testing. However, because of reasons already cited, the Control group was allowed to continue normally with their daily chores (for six months). To safeguard the interests of the study the investigator kept checking the activity of the Yoganidra sessions from time to time. Also, during this period if the participants needed any help it was duly and instantly provided by the investigator.

In this way, the data collection was carried out in the pre and post phases for the two groups so that it could be subjected to adequate statistical treatment for the final analysis and conclusion.

Results and Discussion:

It was necessary for obvious reasons that there should be no significant difference between the Control and Experimental groups in the pre-testing phase. Thus, the Mean and SDs for both the groups were calculated and their significance of difference determined with the popular method of Critical ratio (the 't' test).

Table - 1

Mean, SD and 't' values for the Control and Experimental groups in the pre-testing phase with respect to their life satisfaction score.

As desired, the Experimental and the Control group did not differ significantly ($t = 0.73$) with respect to their life satisfaction scores in the pretesting phase, as evident from the data of Table-1. Consequently, it can be deduced that the first hypothesis regarding the above assumption seems to be substantially verified.

Table 1:

Variable	Control (N=250)		Experimental (N=250)		't'	Significance Level
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Life Satisfaction	11.28	3.27	11.05	3.74	0.73	Not significant

The main purpose of the present study was to find out whether there was any significant difference between the Experimental and Control groups with respect to their life satisfaction Scores in the post testing phase. The values obtained can be seen in the following Table:

Table 2:

Mean, SD and 't' values for the Control and Experimental groups on Life Satisfaction score in the Post-testing Phase.

Variable	Control (N=250)		Experimental (N=250)		't'	Significance Level
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Life Satisfaction	11.12	3.30	13.65	3.34	8.59	<0.1

A cursory look at above Table indicates that, true to expectation and hypothesisation, the Control and Experimental groups differed significantly in their satisfaction of life scores ($t = 8.59, < .01$) indicating thereby that Yognidra indeed does have a positive impact on the aged as regards their feeling of satisfaction towards of life. The finding becomes even so relevant in the light of the results depicted in Table - 1 wherein no significant difference between the groups was found in the pre-testing phase of the study.

Empirical studies are often bound by certain constraints relating to methodology and acceptability of data. One of these is the change or no change in response when there is no treatment given. In the present case also the Control group was allowed to continue with their normal day to day activity. If the response in the pre testing phase differed significantly from the post testing phase then the interpretation of obtained data needed unobtrusive conclusions. The Data in the following Table will clarify the issue.

Table 3:

Variable	Pre-Phase		Post-Phase		't'	Significance Level
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Life Satisfaction	11.28	3.29	11.10	3.28	0.62	Not significant

Table – 3 indicates that the Control group on account of continuing with their normal routine during the 6 month period of observation did not differ in the pre and post phases. The 't' value ($t=0.62$) obtained thereby is statistically not significant. Thus, the third hypothesis is also confirmed.

Now, the results of the main effect have been discussed. The experimental group was made to practice yoganidra for forty minutes for six months. The following table summarizes the findings thus.

Table 4:

Mean, SD and 't' values for Experimental group for Life Satisfaction Score at pre and post phases.

Variable	Pre-Phase		Post-Phase		't'	Significance Level
Life Satisfaction	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	9.03	<0.1
	11.03	3.74	13.67	3.36		

A look at the above table (Table 4) indicates that for the Experimental group Mean and SD in the pre phase were 11.03 and 3.74 respectively and same in the post phase increased considerably (Mean=13.67 and SD=3.36). The 't' value was found to be 9.03 which is significant at the .01 level of significance. Consequently, it can be held at regular practice of Yognidra for a considerable period of time does have a positive impact on the feeling of life satisfaction amongst the aged. Thus, the fourth hypothesis framed for the present study is also upheld.

The results in the above tables indicate that with respect to the feeling of satisfaction towards life no significant difference was envisaged between the Experimental and Control groups in the pre-testing phase. However, after six months intervention in the form of Yoganidra the Experimental group differed with the Control group significantly (i.e at the .01 level of significance) in this respect. As far as satisfaction towards life was concerned for the control group during normal activity for six months no significant perceptible difference was found to occur. Lastly, also more importantly, six months of regular practice of Yoganidra by the Experimental group brought significant changes in their life satisfaction indices.

The Indian culture is religious in nature. Hence, the world view of the Hindus is basically religious. The metaphysical and spiritual assumption of yoga too can be thought to skew

the results in this direction, Hence, the 'spiritual healing' effect cannot be ruled out. Yoga is much more than just "advanced Physiotherapy" or "deep breathing exercises". Rather, the simultaneous use of mantras in all types of yogic activity makes it spiritually suggestive, hypnotic and acceptable for the Hindus.

Thus the session of '*Sankalpa*' (resolve) is an important one in the course of the practice of Yoganidra. Firstly it is repeated number of times (thrice in each). Thus, the seriousness of the resolve is maintained all through with utmost care and commitment. Secondly the repetition of '*sankalpa*' is auto suggestive with the aided advantage of a sense of some sort of spirituality inherent therein. Lastly, the content of the resolve inculcates the feeling to the practitioner 'I shall be all right if I continue practicing Yognidra seriously for some time'.

This hypnotic feeling supposedly induces a certain sense of well-being to the *Sadak*.

Swami Niranjananand (1990) is of the view that the causes of imbalance of any sort, according to Yoga, can be attributed to four factors- Physiological (*sharirik*), mental (*mansik*), *pranik* and *atmik*. As, the decreasing feeling of satisfaction in life in the old age is also to an extent an imbalance (in the level of existence) factors outlined above by Swami Niranjananand may have some bearing for the problem being discussed here. Firstly as Yoganidra in practiced in *Shavasana* (corpse pose), the physiological advantages achieved in this asana are automatically felt by the practitioner. Secondly, due to the effect of autosuggestion, hypnosis and spiritual healing the mental factors are also simultaneously neutralized and positively enhanced. Thirdly the *pranik* factors, that is, the smooth flow of the vital energy (*pran*) throughout the body, are regulated as the Yoganidra session is continued for a certain period of time. Lastly, the *atmik* factors- this realm of knowledge is a transcendental one and at the moment there is hardly any explanation in Psychology, with the exception to an extent in neuropsychology and parapsychology as to what the term, '*atma*' actually denotes. Nevertheless, at a higher level the *atmik* factors can also be thought to be harnessed through Yognidra.

Thus the finding of the present study can be explained on the basis of the above mentioned typical character of the basically religious Indian culture which is rather different from there in the West where the aged are 'forced to resign/detach' in life and seek refuse in 'Old Age Homes' leading a lonely and hopeless life. In spite of the disintegration of the joint family system and the fast life of the young generation the aged in India receive respect and affection from their younger counterpart so much so that the preparation for the passing away to 'another life' is essentially seen as auspicious event and thus the "transmigration of soul" has very deep social and religious implications.

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Cite this paper as: Sinha, B., Bharti, M., and Shree, S. (2015). Yognidra, old age and satisfaction towards life: an empirical study. *International Journal of Science and Consciousness*; 1(1):13-21.