

Yoga Awareness and Misconceptions Among Adults: Bridging the Knowledge Gap

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Abstract

Yoga, an ancient practice originating in India, has gradually evolved from a spiritual discipline into a widely recognized approach to health and wellness across the world. This study explored adults' understanding, perceptions, and misconceptions of yoga within the age group of 25–60 years. Using a descriptive survey of 34 participants, the research examined knowledge of yoga's physical and psychological benefits, myths, awareness of classical traditions, and knowledge of International Yoga Day themes. Results showed that while respondents strongly recognized yoga's health benefits and dismissed most myths, there were significant gaps in awareness of its historical background, philosophical aspects, and classical systems. Findings also revealed that International Yoga Day is often celebrated symbolically rather than educationally. The study concludes by recommending awareness campaigns, educational integration, and effective use of International Yoga Day to encourage more holistic engagement with yoga.

Keywords: *Yoga, Awareness, Misconceptions, Holistic Health, Knowledge Gaps, International Yoga Day*

Introduction

The word *yoga* is derived from the Sanskrit root *yuj*, meaning “to unite.” It encompasses not only physical postures (*asanas*), breathing techniques (*pranayama*), and meditation (*dhyana*), but also ethical principles (*yamas* and *niyamas*). In its original form, yoga was intended as a complete path of self-discipline and inner realization (Iyengar, 2005).

In today's world, yoga is increasingly viewed as a health-enhancing activity. Research has highlighted its role in lowering stress, improving flexibility, strengthening the heart, and regulating emotions (Woodyard, 2011). Its global status was reinforced when the United Nations designated June 21st as International Yoga Day in 2015 (UN, 2015).

However, despite its popularity, public understanding of yoga is often incomplete. Misconceptions persist, such as the belief that yoga is meant only for women, requires exceptional fitness, or belongs to one religion. Moreover, yoga is frequently associated with postures alone, while its philosophical and meditative dimensions receive less attention. This study investigates such patterns among adults and seeks to identify areas where awareness can be deepened.

Need for the Study

Although yoga is now practiced worldwide, its original cultural and philosophical essence is often overlooked. Many adults still equate yoga only with exercise or performance, while some continue to view it through religious or gendered lenses. Adults aged 25–60, who face significant stress due to professional and personal demands, form a crucial group for study. By assessing their level of awareness and misconceptions, better awareness initiatives can be designed. Strengthening International Yoga Day initiatives and incorporating yoga education in community and institutional programs can help restore its holistic nature.

Review of Related Literature

- Iyengar (2005) emphasized yoga as a comprehensive spiritual path rather than a system of postures alone.
- Woodyard (2011) and Ross & Thomas (2012) highlighted yoga's effectiveness in reducing stress and promoting overall well-being.
- Telles et al. (2012) and Khalsa et al. (2015) confirmed yoga's value in supporting mental health and educational outcomes.

- Smith (2019) observed that digital platforms often promote yoga as a performance practice, reducing it to aesthetics.
- Frawley (2010) called for the preservation of yoga's cultural authenticity in the face of globalization.
- The UN's recognition of International Yoga Day in 2015 confirmed its worldwide acceptance, but scholars note the need for stronger educational elements in its observance.

These studies collectively show that yoga's health benefits are widely accepted, yet misconceptions, oversimplifications, and superficial engagement remain common.

Aims and Objectives

Aim

To evaluate adults' awareness, perceptions, and misconceptions about yoga.

Objectives

1. To explore awareness of yoga's physical, psychological, and cognitive benefits.
2. To identify myths and misconceptions that persist.
3. To assess knowledge of yoga's historical origins, classical traditions, and International Yoga Day themes.
4. To examine perceptions of disadvantages or limitations of yoga.
5. To recommend strategies for encouraging informed and holistic engagement.

Methodology

- **Design:** Descriptive cross-sectional survey.
- **Sample -Adults** (aged 25–60, male and female).
- **Sampling:** Convenience sampling
- **Tool:** Structured questionnaire with 26 closed-ended and 2 open-ended questions. Items covered perceived benefits (6), myths and misconceptions (12), and awareness/knowledge (6). Two open-ended items captured perceived benefits and disadvantages.
- **Validity and Reliability:** Content and face validity ensured through expert review and pre-testing. Reliability was measured with a KR-20 coefficient of 0.82, indicating strong consistency.

Findings and Analysis

Objective 1 – Awareness of Benefits

- All participants agreed that yoga improves mental health, sleep, physical strength, and stress management.
- 97% also linked yoga with improved discipline, mindfulness, and emotional balance.

Analysis: The high level of awareness reflects the success of media and medical endorsements. However, the focus appeared to be on immediate health outcomes rather than the deeper philosophical aims of yoga.

Objective 2 – Misconceptions

- 100% rejected the idea that yoga is only for women.
- 97% disagreed with the misconception that yoga is “only stretching” or tied to one religion.
- 85% rejected the belief that yoga should be avoided during menstruation.
- 41% believed advanced postures indicated higher ability or superiority.

Analysis: While older misconceptions are declining, the association of advanced postures with superiority reflects the growing influence of “performance yoga,” shaped largely by social media portrayals (Smith, 2019). This diverges from yoga’s ethical foundation of non-competition and humility.

Objective 3 – Knowledge of History, Traditions, and International Yoga Day

- All respondents acknowledged yoga’s Indian origins, though 35% also linked its development to the West.
- 97% were aware of June 21 as International Yoga Day, but only 41% could identify the 2023 theme.
- Awareness of classical traditions such as Ashtanga, Raja, or Kriya Yoga was limited.

Analysis: While respondents recognized yoga’s ancient roots, misconceptions linking it to the West reveal a historical disconnect. The limited knowledge of International Yoga Day themes suggests that the event is often viewed as ceremonial rather than educational.

Objective 4 – Perceived Disadvantages

- Most participants reported no disadvantages.
- A few mentioned possible injuries, health contraindications, or risks from unsupervised practice.

Analysis: The overwhelmingly positive view reflects yoga’s safe image. However, the limited recognition of contraindications indicates the need for guidance and safety awareness, especially for individuals with medical conditions.

Final Discussion

The findings confirm yoga’s strong acceptance as a health practice among adults. Misconceptions regarding gender, religion, and menstruation have declined significantly, reflecting effective awareness efforts. Yet, engagement with yoga remains primarily physical, with limited understanding of classical traditions, philosophy, and ethical principles. The influence of digital media has given rise to a culture of performance-oriented yoga, reducing it to aesthetics and competition. While International Yoga Day is widely acknowledged, its educational potential is underutilized.

Significance of the Study

- Reinforces yoga's role in promoting health and well-being.
- Highlights the gap between physical practice and deeper philosophical understanding.
- Emphasizes the need for authentic representation of yoga beyond social media portrayals.
- Provides directions for policymakers and educators to use International Yoga Day as a platform for deeper learning.

Conclusion

The study demonstrates that while yoga enjoys widespread acceptance as a tool for physical and mental health, engagement is often restricted to surface-level practice, primarily postures. Knowledge gaps remain concerning yoga's history, philosophy, and classical forms. Addressing these issues requires targeted awareness campaigns, integration of yoga education in curricula, and stronger promotion of International Yoga Day themes. A holistic engagement with yoga can preserve its cultural roots while enhancing its relevance for modern well-being.

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