

University-based online yoga education: A pilot study of students' experience

Sir,

The pressures of modern life, characterized by unhealthy eating habits and a lack of physical exercise are amplified by the demands of a knowledge economy and the internet, which allows information to be sought and delivered at a pace that can be overwhelming. The stress of studying at university further adds to personal and work stress, and influences students' physical and mental health and academic performance.^[1,2]

We explored the ability of the internet to provide a solution to stress in university students by assessing student's experience of a 12-week, university-based, online course on "Yoga Fundamentals." This course provides both theoretical and practical components designed to give students a good theoretical foundation for yoga along with practical experience. The course is delivered through online video lectures, selected readings, PowerPoint presentations, regular E-mails, and participation in online discussion forums along with home-based physical practice guided by videos, photos, and audio files that cater for different learning styles.

Thirty-four students undertook an anonymous online questionnaire that examined the influence of participants' yoga practice on their sense of well-being. Results indicated that all students benefitted from their involvement in the yoga course in terms of their mental, emotionally, and physical well-being and suggested that practical yoga exercises enhanced students' ability to master their own physiological and psychological responses to stress, foster resilience and their ability to navigate their student experience. Students expressed that they experienced increased calm, focus, and clarity; an improved sense of belonging and connection; and relief from muscle tension from sitting for long periods.

The survey results suggest that yoga can be effectively taught through an online format to university students who already have some familiarity with online learning. The results further suggest that study, work, and family demands create barriers to regular yoga practice and that students need help to develop strategies to maintain a regular yoga practice.

The benefits offered by online yoga education suggests that ancient yogic wisdom aligns well with modern professional practices and that yoga education could be integrated into course curriculums for health practitioner

students to help them manage stress better and inform their clinical recommendations to clients once they enter professional practice. Further controlled studies with long-term follow-up are now required to compare online and face-to-face education, document the specific mental, psychological, emotional, and physical benefits of yoga education, and determine the applicability of online yoga education to a broader spectrum of students.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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