

Effect of *Trataka Kriya* on Selected Psychological Parameters in School Teachers During the COVID- 19 Pandemic Situation: A Randomized Controlled Trial

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Abstract

Objectives: The present study focused on investigating the impact of *Trataka* on stress-related ailments associated with online teaching and lockdown conditions among school teachers. The main objective of the study is to assess the effect of regular *Trataka Kriya* practice on Perceived Stress, Anxiety, Self-Perception, Parental Stress, Mental Well Being and Occupational Stress in School Teachers during the COVID- 19 Pandemic.

Methods: The present study is a two-arm, randomized controlled trial. Both male and female teachers of age ranging from 35- 50 Yrs., having no health complications, as well as, those not practicing *Trataka Kriya* routinely, were enrolled in the study. The study volunteers matched in respect of age and gender, were then divided into an experimental (n= 52) and a wait-listed control group (n= 52) with the help of Block Randomization method. Of the 104 teachers selected for the study, 68 completed the entire protocol. Data were collected at two time points at pre-testing (T_0) and post-testing (T_1).

Results: Results showed a significant reduction in the perceived stress ($p= 0.003$), generalized anxiety ($p = 0.006$), parental stress ($p<0.0001$), and occupational stress index ($p<0.0001$) in the experimental group. The experimental group results also showed significant improvement in the self-perception ($p<0.0001$), Mental well-being ($p<0.0001$) and sleep quality ($p = 0.054$).

Conclusion: *Trataka Kriya* practice has shown to significantly improve mental well-being, self-perception, and reduce anxiety and stress levels among school teachers.

Keywords: Stress, anxiety, depression, *Trataka Kriya*, mental well-being, sleep quality

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Introduction

Trataka is one of the six cleansing processes in *Hatha Yoga* that cures eye diseases and wards off sloth according to *Hatha Pradipika* (II:35)⁽⁷⁾. There are clinical observations, based on about 100 experiments, conducted at Kaivalyadhama, Lonavla (1975)⁽⁴⁾, as well as, clinical observations, done at Bihar School of Yoga Munger, Bihar⁽²⁴⁾, that suggest that *Trataka* helps in psychological cleansing through *Mental Catharsis* (*Non-reactive witnessing* of the repressed thoughts, emotions, memories getting surfaced and getting cleansed away), and also through detecting the precipitating factors behind the manifestation of stress, anxiety and emotional disorders. *Trataka* unburdens one from many a complex, embedded deep at the unconscious level, thus facilitating *sensory feedback* within the body. As it enhances lachrymal fluid secretion, which has phagocytic action against microorganisms or any other foreign particles, it protects eyes from eye diseases. *Gheranda Samhita* says, *Trataka* helps the practitioner to achieve the *Shambhavi Mudra*, facilitating *Dhyana* i.e. meditation⁽⁸⁾ in the process.

Research proved that if one manages stress, and know art of relaxation can improve the quality of life, affecting positivity to life expectancy.^(6,18,13) Yogic relaxation techniques helped in relieving stress, anxiety and enhancing emotional balance in individuals^(25,12,3,17) and thus helped to improve immune status.^(13,18) A significant reduction, in impulsiveness, emotional stability, oppositional and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) index, were observed when *Trataka*, along with other *yogic practices* was given as an intervention.⁽¹⁵⁾ *Trataka* helped to get relief from eye diseases.^(2,10) Many research findings have shown that *Trataka* was not just helpful in managing and curing the diseases of eyes, but it also helped in psychological cleansing, when it cleansed the mental burden and thus helped to maintain a sound Mental Health.⁽¹²⁾ *Trataka* helped the patients of anxiety to recover from psychological disorders.^(12,23) There are some studies in which *Trataka*, in combination with other yogic practices, was found helpful in improving mental stability, developing a strong will power, reducing agitation,

improves psychomotor functions and in reducing anxiety.^(1,15,10,2,16) If Mental Health of a person is good then he can handle the extreme stress with more ease and can't feel anxious in any difficult situations. *Trataka* was found to improve cognitive ability,^(1,9) concentration⁽⁹⁾ and attention^(1,9) of a practitioner to help him to take a better decision in their life and can tackle any situation easily. *Trataka*, being a relaxation inducing practice, can help in personal well-being, self-adjustment and social adjustment. Thus, a regular practice of *Trataka* can help maintain physical and mental health of a practitioner.

During Corona Virus Disease(COVID) pandemic situation the emotional health of the teachers were badly affected as they had to cope up with the online teaching and COVID together. Teachers faced lots of psychological problems like depression, tensions and disturbances in their personal and professional life during the Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19).⁽²⁸⁾ Teachers' Mental Health were studied during the Covid-19 pandemic in Poland for having an insight about treating it.⁽¹⁴⁾ *Trataka* has been found to have ameliorating effect on insomnia severity and quality of sleep in people with insomnia.⁽²⁶⁾

The present study, on school teachers, during the COVID pandemic was undertaken, using the parameters having a strong correlation with stress borne maladies, so as to investigate the effect of *Trataka* in teachers who were genuinely under stress while preparing their study lessons online, as well as, other problems associated with the lockdown condition.

Methods

Study design:

The present study is a two-arm randomized controlled trial (Fig 1). The study was approved by the Independent Ethics Committee (IEC) of the implementing Institute (IEC Reg No.: Kdham/SRD/IEC-07/2020/01). An experiment procedure aligns with the ethical standards of the responsible committee on human experimentation and comply with the Helsinki Declaration of 1964, as revised in 2013. Participants' written informed consent was obtained followed by orientation lectures and information sheets.

Data was collected at two time points at pre-testing (T_0) and post-testing (T_1). Self-report questionnaires were administered using one-to-one mode by the experienced psychologists at T_0 and T_1 . After pre-testing the subjects of the Experimental Group (EG) were exposed to three months, three days a week, 8 min a day, of *Trataka Kriya* practice, whereas, the control group was waitlisted for the said period. Except for the *Trataka Kriya* intervention to the Experimental group, there was no difference in the routines between the two groups. Upon completion of the training to the Experimental group, subjects of both the groups underwent a post-test assessment on the selected parameters at T_1 . After completion of the study, the Wait-listed Control Group (WCG) participants were given the same training.

Participants:

All the study participants were teachers, from a local School, institution's secondary School and a School of Pune, aged 35 to 50, having no health complications like migraines, vertigo, etc., as well as, those not practicing *Trataka Kriya* routinely, were enrolled in the study. Patients with acute pathological conditions of eye disorders, as well as, those suffering from asthma, diabetes and hypertension were excluded from the study.

A total of 148 teachers were assessed for the eligibility, of those 104 teachers found suitable for the study. The study volunteers matched in respect of age and gender, were then divided into Experimental ($n= 52$) and WCG ($n= 52$) with the help of Block Randomization method. Of the 104 teachers selected for the study, 70 completed the entire protocol.

Intervention:

For the Experimental Group, traditional *Trataka Kriya* practices with sesame oil *diya* were used. The distance, between wick of a flame and eyes, was one meter, at the level of eyes, parallel to the ground. The actual *Trataka Kriya* practice period was of 8 minutes followed by a rest in supine position for 10 minutes. An experienced yoga teacher conducted all *Trataka Kriya* practice sessions.

Outcome variables:

The following tests, corresponding to selected parameters were administered

Self-report questionnaires:

Perceived Stress Scale (PSS): It measures the perception of stress. The reliability coefficient (Cronbach's α) for the Perceived Stress Scale is 0.715.⁽²¹⁾

Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) 7- It is seven item scale and the reliability coefficient (Cronbach's α) for the GAD-7 scale is 0.895⁽⁵⁾.

Kaivalyadhama Self-perception Rating Scale (KSRS)- A custom-made test developed, based on Osgood's Semantic Differential Method, at Kaivalyadhama.

Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS)- WEMWBS is a 14-item scale, the reliability coefficient (Cronbach's α) for WEMWBS is 0.89 in student sample and 0.91 in population sample.⁽²⁹⁾

Parental Stress Scale (PSS)* - PSS is a parent-report measure used to assess stress related to parenting. The reliability coefficient (Cronbach's α) for PSS* is 0.74.⁽²²⁾

Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index (PSQI): PSQI assesses sleep quality and disturbances over a 1-month time interval. The reliability coefficient (Cronbach's α) for PSQI is 0.736⁽²⁰⁾.

Occupational Stress Index (OSI)- It measures Occupational/Job Stress (Hindi version).⁽²⁷⁾The reliability coefficient (Cronbach's α) for OSI is 0.72- 0.91.

Statistical Analysis:

Data was analysed, with the help of R-software version 4.1.2, using descriptive statistics, Within Group and Between Group results were compared with the help of paired t-test and independent samples t-test respectively.

Results

The results above show the efficacy of the traditional mode of *Trataka* with a remarkably enhanced statistical significance. in case of the parameters of Perceived Stress, Generalized Anxiety, Self-Perception, Mental Well-Being, Parental Stress, Sleep Quality and Occupational Stress in School Teachers. Both Within (Table 1, Fig 2 & 3) and Between Group (Table 2, Fig 4 & 5) comparison,

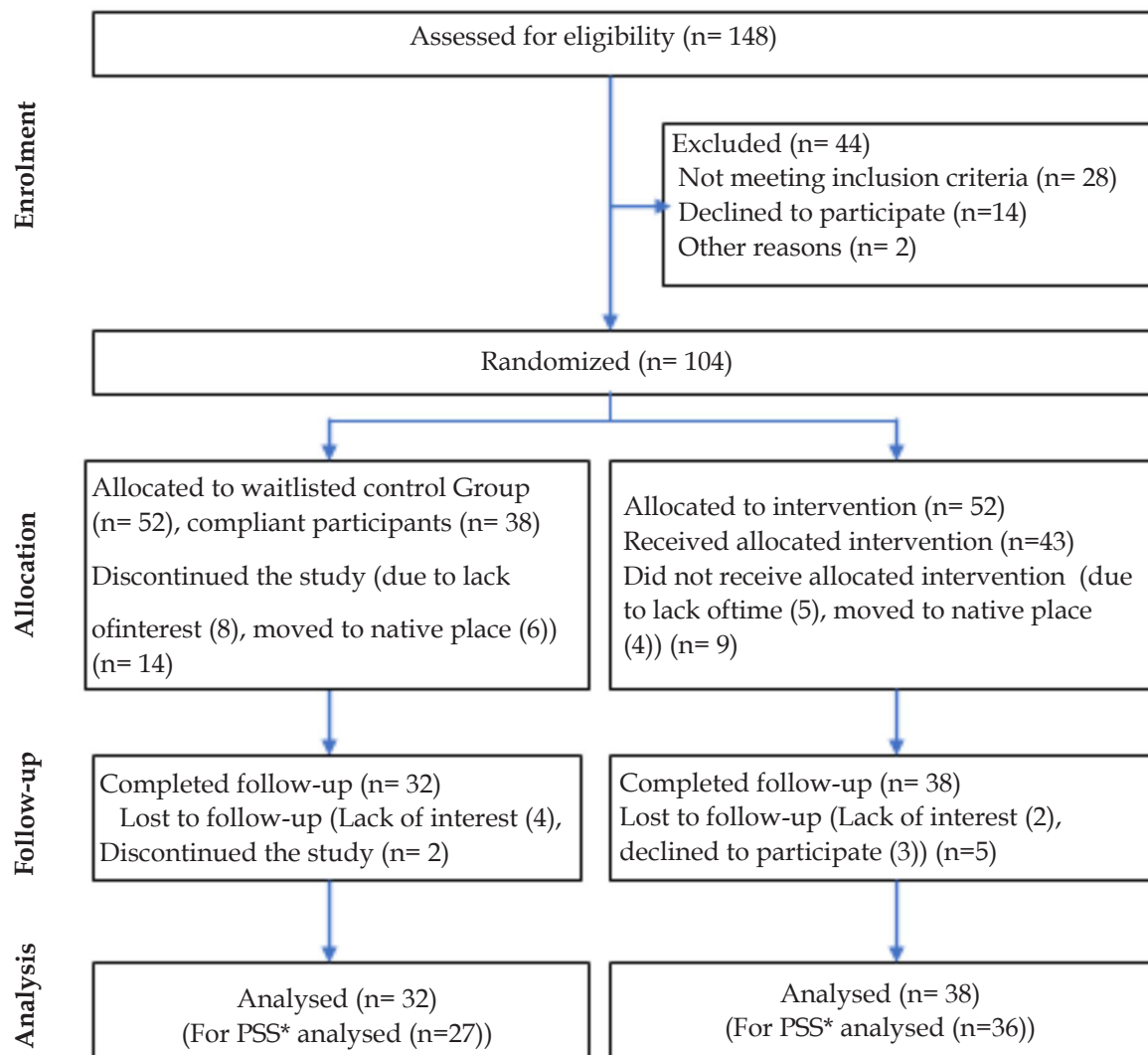


Figure 1: Consort Statement

showing statistical significance, following the intervention of *Trataka*, speak volume of the efficacy of *Trataka* in countering the stress responses of school

teachers, who were often seen engaged in overwork and extremely busy schedules at schools.

Table 1: Within Group Comparison

Parameters	WCG (n= 32)			EG (n = 38)		
	T ₀	T ₁	p- value	T ₀	T ₁	p- value
PSS	19.22±5.43	19.38±5.08	0.819	20.21±7.64	16.47±5.14	0.003
GAD-7	6.34±4.27	7.69±5.86	0.086	7.45±5.61	5.16±4.28	0.006
KSRS	24.60±7.22	23.10±7.37	-0.045	21.87±8.33	26.47±6.64	<0.0001
WEMWBS	53.97±8.73	50.33±12.05	-0.055	51.92±7.39	57.42±6.77	<0.0001
PSS*	37.33±9.72	40.19±6.75	0.100	40.42±8.17	35.58±8.37	<0.0001
PSQI	5.28±2.73	5.22±2.88	0.867	6.08±2.80	6.92±3.43	0.054
TOTAL OSI	121.35±16.23	125.26±17.75	0.160	127.26±17.50	113.39±14.81	<0.0001

[PSS= Perceived Stress scale, GAD-7= Generalized Anxiety Disorder- 7, KSRS= Kaivalyadhama Self-Perception Rating Scale, WEMWBS= Warwick-Edinburgh Mental well-being scale, PSS*= Parental Stress Scale, PSQI= The Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index, OSI= Occupational Stress Index]

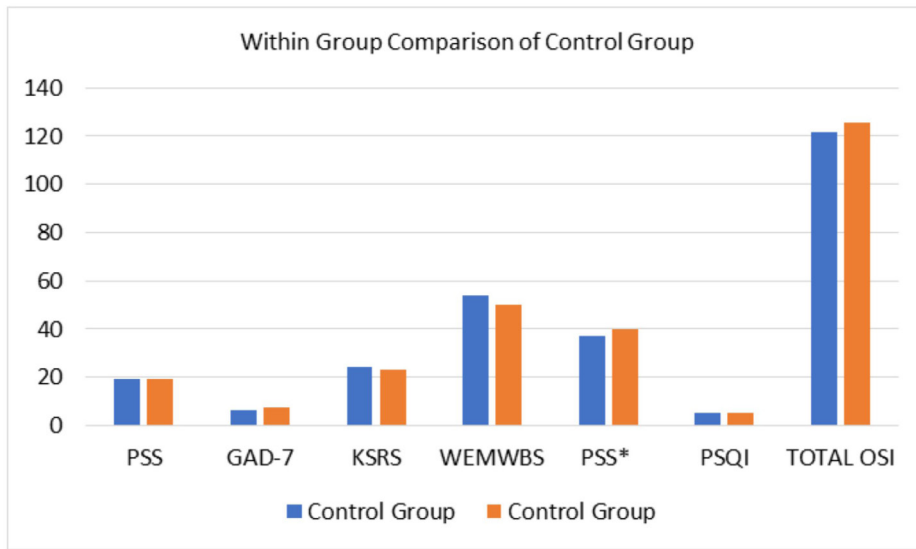


Figure 2: Within Group Comparison of Control Group

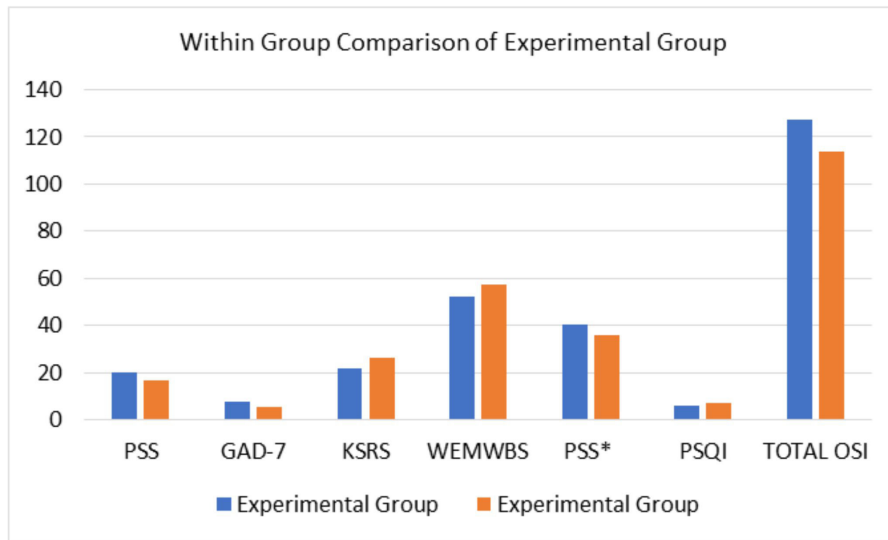


Figure 3: Within Group Comparison of Control Group

Table 2: Between Group Comparison

Parameters	T ₀			T ₁		
	WCG	EG	p-value	WCG	EG	p-value
PSS	19.22±5.43	20.28±8.09	0.545	19.38±5.08	16.34±5.12	0.004
GAD 7	6.34±4.27	7.66±5.98	0.340	7.69±5.86	5.47±4.46	0.085
KSRS	24.60±7.22	23.63±7.89	0.630	23.10±7.37	27.10±6.02	0.021
WEMWBS	53.97±8.73	52.70±7.48	0.461	50.33±12.05	58.20±6.43	0.003
PSS*	37.33±9.72	40.96±6.86	0.145	40.19±6.75	36.93±7.99	0.169
PSQI	5.28±2.73	6.44±2.84	0.155	5.22±2.88	7.06±3.41	0.019
TOTAL OSI	121.35±16.23	126.81±18.47	0.236	125.26±17.75	113.29±14.95	0.004

[PSS= Perceived Stress scale, GAD-7=Generalized Anxiety Disorder- 7, KSRS= Kaivalyadhama Self-Perception Rating Scale, WEMWBS= Warwick-Edinburgh Mental well-being scale, PSS*= Parental Stress Scale, PSQI= The Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index, OSI= Occupational Stress Index]

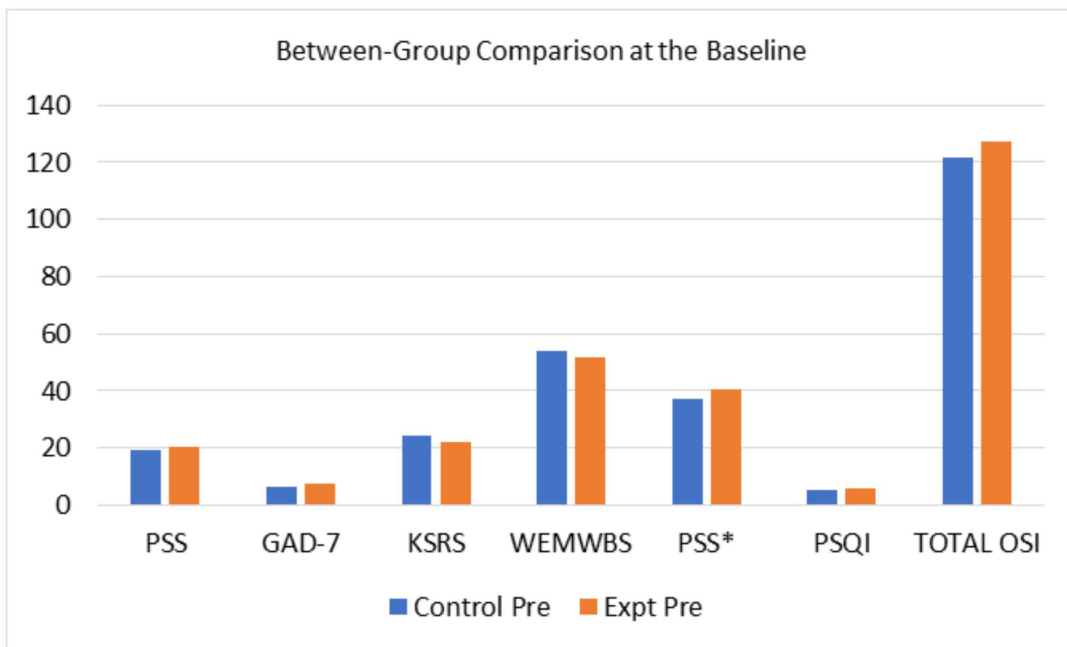


Figure 4: Between Group Comparison at the Baseline

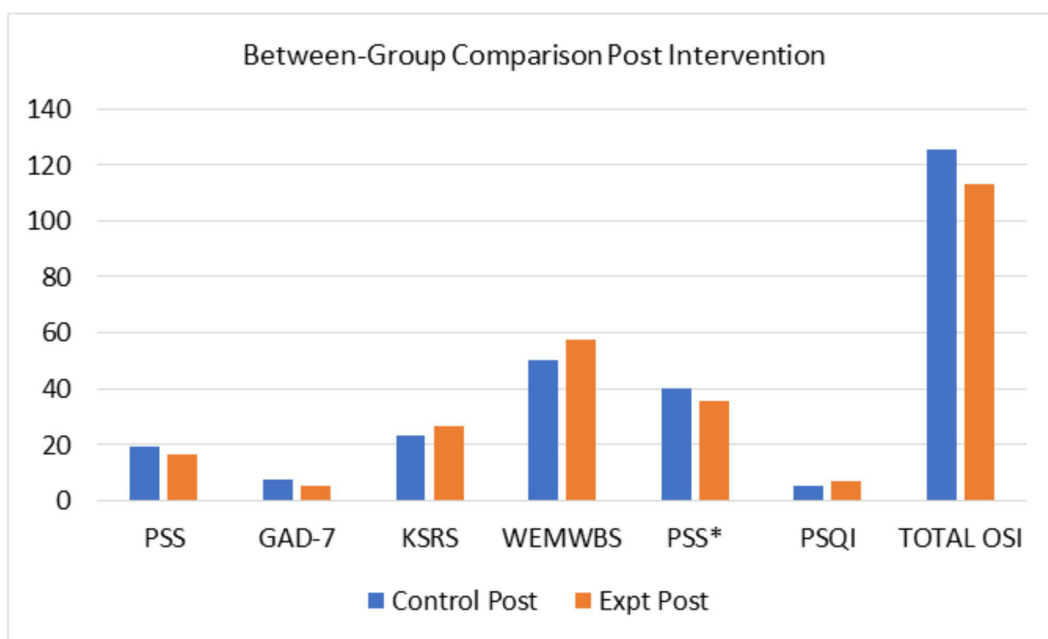


Figure 5: Between Group Comparison Post Intervention

Discussion

As *Trataka*, being mentioned as one of the six cleansing processes in yoga, cleanses *nadis*, and thus facilitates an ideal flow of *prana*. As *Udana Prana* is associated with oculomotor functions the eye disorders are managed properly, as mentioned in *Hatha Yoga* texts. As *Udana Prana* is also associated

with higher psychological processes, *Trataka* is expected to correct psychological functions as well.⁽¹⁹⁾ Preliminary findings of the experiments conducted at Kaivalyadhama and Bihar School of Yoga, as mentioned earlier, have corroborated this line of reasoning.^(3,17) At Kaivalyadhama, about 100 experiments made it explicit that *Trataka* carries out cleansing at the psychological level when

many repressed and suppressed wishes, feelings, emotions and memories come to the surface of the mind before finding their way out, giving an unburdening effect, through phylo-analysis,⁽¹¹⁾ in case of *Trataka* practitioners. *Hatha Pradipika* speaks of the interdependence of *Citta* and *Prana*.⁽⁷⁾ Therefore, with *Citta* calming down, due to the cathartic effect of *Trataka*, the *Prana* follows suit and becomes calm, facilitating psychophysiological functions of the *Trataka* practitioner. *Trataka* thus relaxes the psychophysiological functions because of its cathartic effects, resulting into witnessing awareness in detecting deep rooted mental complexes and thus enhances further the mental relaxation in the process. As a result, practitioners' general awareness might have been enhanced influencing their Self Perception and Perceived Stress favorably. The enhanced awareness might have also proved to be instrumental in reducing Parental Stress, Generalized Anxiety and Occupational Stress, as well as, in enhancing Mental Well-Being and Sleep Quality, in School Teachers in this study.

Three months, three days a week, 8 min a day of *Trataka* practice, showing statistically significant changes in all parameters, in both Within Group and Between Group comparisons, is indicative of a clear efficacy of *Trataka* for effectively tackling stress responses of the school teachers and also endowing them with an enhanced mental well-being. Both Within Group and Between Group analyses amply correlate, in respect of statistical significance with respect to the favorable effect of *Trataka* in the selected parameters. Control Group, on the other hand, not showing significant changes in any of the parameters in case of both Within Group and Between Group analyses, amply lends support to the favorable changes observed in the experimental group. The results are fairly consistent in showing the efficacy of *Trataka Kriya* on the measures of Stress, Anxiety, Mental Well Being, Sleep Quality and occupational stress in the School Teachers during the COVID- 19 Pandemic condition⁽²⁸⁾

Trataka Kriya is often a neglected cleansing process (*Shuddhi Kriya*). The yogic literature also does not speak explicitly about its efficacy for mental imbalances except mentioning its utility in treating the oculomotor diseases and in removal of sloth.

Thanks to the initial work done by Kaivalyadhama and Bihar School of Yoga that these researchers started taking interest in this hitherto often neglected *Shuddhi Kriya*, as a part of yoga research. Since *Trataka* is one of the chief cleansing processes mentioned in yogic texts *Hathapradipika*⁽⁷⁾ and *Gheranda Samhita*,⁽⁸⁾ the researchers had a logical line of reasoning that *Trataka* must be contributing to cleansing of *nadis* and consequently contributing to corrections in the *pranic* (energy) flow within its practitioners and thus affecting favorably all psycho-physiological functions. Since the area of *Udana Prana* encompasses the neuronal processes, the *Trataka* practice, in all probabilities, have an influence on the same in a pronounced way, helping all psychological processes favorably.

Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) was reduced significantly in case of Within Group Comparison in Experimental Group ($p < 0.006$) as against Control Group showing only an approaching statistical change ($p > 0.086$) following the three months *Trataka* intervention period. Between Group Comparison amply corroborates the results seen in Within Group Comparison with an approaching significance ($p < 0.085$). Perceived Stress found reduced significantly ($p < 0.003$) while Control Group showed no significant change ($p > 0.819$) as regards Within Group Comparison. These results were further corroborated by Between Group Comparison when Experimental Group showed significant reduction in Perceived Stress ($p < 0.004$). Sleep Quality Index Global Score was enhanced significantly ($p < 0.054$) in the Experimental Group while Control Group registered non-significant change ($p > 0.867$) in case of Within Group Comparison. Between Group Comparison amply supported these results when Experimental Group showed statistically significant change ($p < 0.019$). Total Occupational Stress was found significantly reduced in Experimental Group ($p < 0.0001$) as against the Control Group showing non-significant change ($p > 0.16$) as regards Within Group Comparison. Between Group Comparison lends support to these results with Experimental Group showing significant reduction in Total Occupational Stress ($p < 0.004$). Scores on Self Perception Rating Scale showed a significant ($p < 0.0001$) enhancement in Experimental Group, indicating positive approach to life and living, as seen in Within Group Comparison

as against the Control Group showing significant decline ($P < 0.045$), indicating its unfavorable approach to life & living. Between Group Comparison further lends support to these findings with Experimental Group showing a significant enhancement in Self Perception ($p < 0.021$). Mental Well-being scores were found to be enhanced significantly ($p < 0.0001$) in Experimental Group, while in Control Group, these scores were found reduced with an approaching significance ($p < 0.055$). Between Group Comparison amply corroborates these findings with Experimental Group showing a statistically significant ($p < 0.003$) change in the scores of Mental Well-being. As well, Total Occupational Stress Index showed a statistically significant reduction ($P < 0.004$) in Experimental Group, in case of Within Group comparison, Control Group. On the other hand, Control Group showed an increase in Total Occupational Stress in Within Group Comparison ($P < 0.216$), though statistically not significant.

Conclusion

Trataka Kriya of 8min duration has been found to be clearly instrumental in enhancing Mental Well-being and positive Self-perception significantly, as well as, in reducing Generalized Anxiety, Perceived Stress, Parental Stress and Occupational Stress significantly and thus underlying the importance of *Trataka* in preserving and promoting Mental Health of school teachers during the pandemic situation.

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Conflicts of interest statement: None to declare

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