



The Role of Sudarshan Kriya on Mental Health

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Abstract:

Various mental problems such as depression, anxiety, substance abuse, insomnia and PTSD etc can be managed through continuous practice of sudarshana kriya (SK) of art of living foundation. Three steps of SK: First-Ujjayi pranayama involves long and deep breathing; Second-Bhastrika pranayama consists of forced inhalation and exhalations; Third-Cyclical breathing includes slow, medium, and fast cycles of breathing; ending with Yoga Nidra or deep relaxation of 15 minutes. Scientific studies showed that practice of SK program proved significant effects on physical health, psychological health, social relationships and overall well being of the practitioners.

Yoga has become increasingly popular in recent decades, as an alternate treatment for various mental problems and general well being. National survey estimated, in the United States, approximately 38 percent of adults (about 4 in 10) and approximately 12 percent of children (about 1 in 9) are using some form of CAM. The various styles of yoga that people use for health purposes typically combine physical postures, breathing techniques, and meditation or relaxation to achieve physical fitness and psychological well being.

One such technique, Sudarshan Kriya Yoga (su = proper, darshana = vision, kriya = purifying action) is a rhythmic breathing technique, based on ancient vedic tradition. It is introduced as a part of art of living workshop designed by H.H. Sri Sri Ravishankar. Three different components are involved in Sudarshan Kriya Yoga. Firstly, Ujjayi pranayam with long and deep breathing includes breathing in, holding, breathing out and holding. Second, Bhastrika pranayama, consist of forced inhalation and exhalations for 2-3 minutes. Third, Cyclical breathing includes slow, medium, and fast cycles rhythmic of breathing. 15 minutes of yoga Nidra/ deep relaxation at the end of the session. The entire procedure will last for about 50-55 minutes.

Depression is a common yet serious medical condition that affects both mind and body. It is a complex illness, creating physical, psychological and social symptoms. Depressions is a major cause for Alcohol dependent syndrome (ADS), tobacco cession and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Currently available treatments for depression such as ECT, pharmacological drug treatment have a lot of side effects. In this regard yoga plays a significant role in the treatment of depression since it does not have any known side effect, easy to practice and cost effective.



In an open study of 46 patients with DSM-IV diagnosis of dysthymia (mean duration of illness 3-15 years) reviewed, SK as a sole treatment for a period of three months. SKY produced a significant improvement after 3 months of practice every day for 50 minutes. The mean total depression scores on both HRSD and BDI too showed significant reductions at one month and this was maintained at 3 months.

SK in a comparative study with electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) and imipramin, demonstrated significant reductions in the total scores on Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) and Hamilton Rating Scale for Depression (HRSD) in all the three groups. Although inferior to ECT, Sudarshan Kriya can be a potential alternative to drugs in melancholia (N. Janakiramaiah et al 2000). The importance of this study is that the patients were all melancholic depressives and the treatment allocation was random. Antidepressant effects in melancholia suggest SK's therapeutic property may not merely be due to a placebo effect. Another study (Rohini et al 2000) suggest that partial and full Sudarshan Kriya Yoga treatments are equipotent with regard to their anti depressant and anti anxiety effects in patients of major depressive disorder.

The pretreatment P300 amplitude in the dysthymic patients was significantly lower than in the normal controls. The P300 amplitude increased with the symptomatic improvement of dysthymia at 3 months (Murthy et al 1997). The P300 amplitude increased in both dysthymics and melancholic patients corresponding to clinical improvement (Murthy et al 1998). Sleep EEG was recorded in 12 melancholies before and after treatment showed the improvement in total sleep architecture. SK treatment produced significant reduction of disturbance during sleep and increases in slow wave sleep following the course (Harish et al 1997).

Serum hormone assay revealed significant acute increase in plasma prolactin but not cortisol levels after a SK session (Janakiramaiah et al 1998). Interestingly, the prolactin elevation did not occur following a sham-SK procedure. Sudarshan (2001) was able to replicate the prolactin elevation effects of SKY in both male and female patients, although this was unrelated to SK's therapeutic effects. Acutely SK had no effect on cortisol. However, after two weeks of SK practice the post session cortisol levels had decreased and continuous practice of SK session lowers the serum cortisol levels. The recent study on alcoholic have indicated that alcoholics practicing SK showed reduction in anxiety and depression and also showed reduction in cortisol and ACTH, considered as stress related hormones (Vedamurthachar et al 2006).

Mass disasters like 2004 South-East Asia tsunami and Hurricane Katrina, causes acute and chronic trauma. Yoga procedures can safely and effectively be used to reduce stress, anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), even under chaotic conditions. Descilo et al (2009) demonstrated that the survivor's 2004 tsunami proves that SK interventions help relieve psychological distress following mass disasters.

Sudarshan Kriya plays a vital role in promoting a healthy lifestyle. Recent finding shows that SK practice improves physical health, psychological, social well being; thus enhancing the overall quality of life of the practitioners (Bedi et al 2010). Participants reported better adjustment in personal, social, occupational and home aspects (Shankar Ram et al. 2002).

It can be concluded that Sudarshan Kriya is a beneficial, low-risk, low-cost adjunct to the treatment of stress, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, substance abuse. It also showed enhances the quality of life, adjustment, overall well-being of an individual.



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