



Yoga therapy, a novel treatment option for somatoform disorders: a case study

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Abstract:

Background: Somatoform disorders are common mental disorders in health settings. Treatment of these disorders are challenging despite availability of variety of options as the efficacy of these treatments is variable. Yoga has been considered as a treatment modality for common mental disorders like anxiety and depression however the use of yoga in treatment of somatoform disorders is limited. **Objective:** Yoga therapy as a potential treatment option for somatoform disorders. **Case report:** Mr Z, 30 year old Muslim gentleman, married, manual labourer by occupation presented with 3 years illness of insidious onset, continuous course characterised by pain in the back, chest, pain in extremities, wrist joint, knee joint, ankle along with spells of headache. These symptoms were associated with gastric dyspepsia and mild sexual dysfunction. Moderate to severe biological and socio-occupational dysfunction was noted. A poor response to conventional analgesics, ayurvedic and herbal remedies was noted in the past. Yoga therapy was offered as a treatment modality and was accepted by the patient. Trial of yoga therapy was provided to him after written informed consent. **Methods:** A comprehensive yoga module consisting of Asana, Pranayama and Dhyana was incorporated in yoga therapy for him. Seven days training followed by home based practice of yoga was advised for 12 weeks. Visual analogue scale (VAS), Brief pain inventory (BPI), Hamilton anxiety rating scale (HAM-A) and Pittsburgh sleep quality index (PSQI) were used for assessment. Analysis was done at the baseline, 2, 6 and 12 weeks prospectively. **Results:** Patient improved completely at the end of 6 weeks and improvement was sustained till 12 weeks. There was significant reduction in VAS, BPI, HAM-A and PSQI scores at the end of 6 and 12 weeks. **Conclusion:** Yoga therapy can be a potential treatment option among the complementary medicine. It has a great potential of being a sole treatment as well as an add on procedure. It has been tried successfully in fibromyalgia, low back pain and arthritis in the past but not in somatoform disorders. More studies are needed to prove the efficacy of yoga therapy in somatoform disorders.

Keywords: Yoga, somatoform, pain.

I INTRODUCTION:

Somatoform disorders are a group of disorders with varied presentations. These symptoms sometimes also referred to as medically unexplained pain symptoms (MUPS) or chronic pain symptoms [1]. Overlap between the diagnosis of dysthymia, anxiety disorders and even depression makes it difficult to define their diagnostic boundaries. Hence treatment options for somatoform disorders are also non-specific [2]. Somatoform disorders are frequently encountered in primary and tertiary clinics. It has been generally found that patients suffering from this disorders are highly disappointed due to non-availability of specific treatment [3, 4]. Somatoform patients keep on shopping the doctors in search of cure of their illness. There are very few treatment options and limited studies supporting an efficacy of established treatments [5]. Innovative treatments are being tried from the field of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) all over the world for the benefit of the patients.

II OBJECTIVE:

This case study highlights the importance of yoga therapy as a novel treatment approach in somatoform disorder.

III CASE REPORT:

Mr Z, 30 years old Muslim gentleman, married, auto-rickshaw driver by occupation presented with 3 years illness of insidious onset, continuous course without apparent precipitating factors characterised by pain in the back, chest, bilateral upper and lower limbs, wrist joint, knee joint, ankle and spells of headache. Symptoms were of intermittent nature and would worsen in the evening time. These symptoms were associated with gastric dyspepsia and mild sexual dysfunction.



He was not able to go for his duties on 2-3 occasions in a month resulting in financial loss as well as could not get a good sleep during those periods. He initially had not responded to conventional analgesics from multiple physicians. He afterwards started ayurvedic and herbal remedies to get rid of disabling symptoms which neither improved nor worsened the symptoms in the past 2.5 years before visiting our hospital.

We stopped all the medicines that he was taking. On outpatient department he was given a choice of treatments and explained about treatment response in somatoform disorders. Patient opted to receive only yoga therapy. After an informed written consent, an outpatient yoga training course for 7 days was given to him by a trained yoga instructor and was asked to continue the practice of yoga at home. Detailed assessment of his symptoms were done using Visual analogue scale, Brief pain inventory, Hamilton anxiety rating scale and Pittsburgh sleep quality index. He was asked to follow up after 2 weeks, 6 weeks and 12 weeks to assess for the symptoms while continuing yoga therapy at home. Visual analogue scale (VAS) and Brief pain inventory (BPI) was applied at baseline, 2, 6 and 12 weeks during the follow up while Hamilton anxiety rating scale (HAM-A) and Pittsburgh sleep quality index (PSQI) was applied at baseline and at the end of 12 weeks.

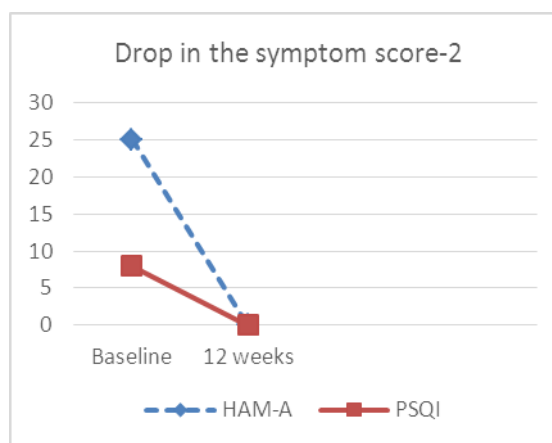
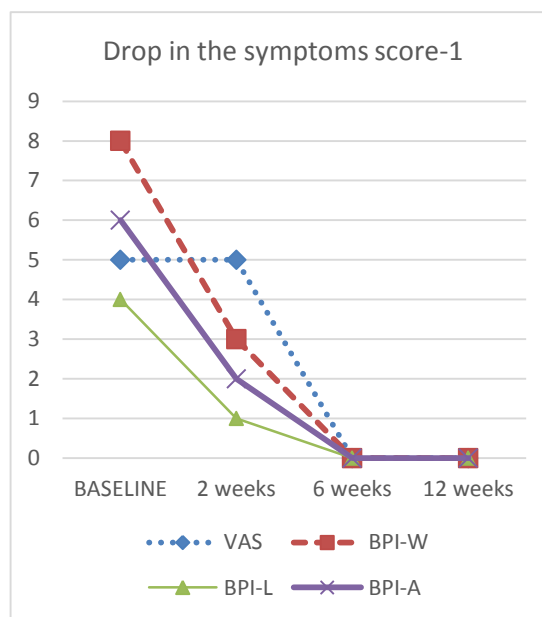
IV RESULTS:

There was significant subjective feeling of being healthy and 100% improvement after 6 weeks which was sustained at the end of 12 weeks as well.

Objective assessment reflected significant drops in VAS, BPI, HAM-A and PSQI scores as compared to baseline depicted in the following table.

Scales used for assessment	Scores			
	Baseline	2 weeks	6 weeks	12 weeks
VAS	5	5	0	0
BPI	Worst	8	3	0
	Least	4	1	0
	Average	6	2	0
HAM-A	25	-	-	0
PSQI	8	-	-	0

Discussion: It is very interesting to know that the complete recovery from somatoform symptoms was only because of yoga intervention within 6 weeks and continued practice maintained the sustained improvement in symptoms and overall quality of life.



Thus yoga therapy appears to be promising treatment option for somatoform disorders.

Research on using yoga therapy as a treatment modality in somatoform disorders need to be established in RCTs. The benefits of yoga are believed to be due to blocking of negative impulses in the mind, which improves the functioning of the tissue, organ and musculoskeletal systems and subsequently increases one's ability to use breath energy or prana to take control over the pain [6]. Studies have also shown increased level of oxytocin and BDNF are likely to contribute to an improvement in the overall quality of health [7, 8].

V CONCLUSION:

Yoga appears to improve the overall quality of life and subjective wellbeing. It also promises the reduction in pain symptoms in somatoform disorder and can be used as a therapeutic tool in clinical practice.

Implications:



Since there is growing interest in the field of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) therapy, more focussed studies in the yoga therapy are required to substantiate the results. More studies with randomised control designs are welcome.

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