

OM Chanting Reduces Psychological Distress Level in Office Workers During Covid 19 Pandemic

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Abstract

Purpose: psychological stress caused due to the current COVID 19 pandemic lock down may have an adverse impact on the quality of life (QoL) in office shift workers. The purpose of the present study was to investigate the effect of OM chanting on the levels of perceived psychological stress, quality of life and sleep among office workers who are confined at home and work during the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Material & Methods: an online OM chanting session was conducted for 20 workers who stayed at home and worked during the pandemic lockdown. Prior to and at the end of the training all the participants finished a battery of self-reported online inventories, including the Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale with 21 items (DASS-21) and quality of life (WHOQOL-BREF).

Results: after ten days of OM chanting, all the participants stated a significant enhancement in all domains of quality of life and a reduction of psychological distress ($P < 0.05$).

Conclusions: OM chanting is feasible, safe and has a positive effect on psychological quality of life of participants. Still further studies have to be done to warrant the findings with suitable study design.

Keywords: Yoga, meditation, chanting, quality of life, covid-19 pandemic

Introduction

The on-going global public health emergency of novel coronavirus 2019 (COVID 19) lead to respiratory distress syndrome and eventually death (Loganathan et al., 2021). The COVID 19 pandemic outbreak started from December 2019 in India (originally it started in China) and has spread to around 110 countries. Until October 2020 the total number of reported death is 1,049,810 all over the world. As a control measure of the spread of coronavirus disease the home confinements and social distancing were followed along with personal hygiene care like frequent hand washing, sanitizing and wearing masks (Rothan & Byrareddy, 2020). The unpredicted mass lock down has developed a stressful situation across the globe (Islam et al., 2020). This current situation has drastically increased the screen exposure time, thus minimizing social interaction or working several hours under stressful conditions. It has put an individual's psychological health under risk with major impact on daily functioning and the quality of life (Ranga et al., 2021). The corporate shift workers are being forced to stay at home and work from the home suddenly during this lockdown period.

Facing a sudden pandemic outbreak, the corporate shift workers have to cope with their COVID related anxiety which reflects on their work performance. The stress and depression are also known to increase the risk of respiratory infection making this group more vulnerable (Maxwell et al., 2015). Until now there is no specific treatment developed against the disease and vaccines are still under trial. The preventive measures like social distancing and home confinement can slow down the transmission process but it is not the permanent solution. An alternate management method like yoga practices which includes posture (asana), breathing exercise (Pranayama) and concentration (meditation) techniques has already been known to improve the physical, physiological and psychological wellbeing to efficiently manage negative emotions like anxiety and depression (Govindasamy et al., 2023; Jagadeesan et al., 2022; Ravi et al., 2022; Venugopal et al., 2020). Meditation is well known to influence the immune markers against virus and also inhibits inflammatory markers thus improving the immunity (Govindasamy et al., 2022; Moorthy et al., 2022). "OM" chanting during meditation is found to relieve the stress conditions in earlier studies (Amin et al., 2016; Harne & Hiwale, 2018; Rajagopalan et al., 2022).

In our current study, we evaluated the psychological stress level in office shift workers after OM chanting session during the pandemic home confinement. The study was conducted based on a self-reported online survey that analyzed the effect of the OM chanting on the psychological stress and quality of life in the current COVID-19 pandemic situation. The purpose of the study is to evaluate the efficacy of OM chanting as a potential coping mechanism for psychological stress during the pandemic-induced home confinement among office shift workers.

Material and methods of research

Study design and study population

This prospective quasi experimental study was carried out among the individuals (n=20; sample size was not calculated). who were working in the corporate sector, performing a work shift while confined at home during the COVID-19 pandemic phase in Chennai All the individuals who meet the above criteria and gave consent for practice of OM chanting were included for the study. The study was conducted between July 2020 and August 2020 after getting ethical approval from the host institution (SMC/IEC/2020/03/039). Informed consent also obtained from the participants for this study.

Intervention details

The subjects were thought proper OM chanting recitation with a help of a trained yoga instructor through an online Zoom meeting. In addition, an OM chanting video was shared with the participants; they were instructed to follow the video and instruction for the daily practice at home. The

participants practiced OM chanting for a duration of 10 days twice a day for 10-20 minutes (morning in-between 6.00 am to 6.10 am and evening practice between 6.00pm to 6.10 pm). The video monitoring of the practice sessions was done daily by the yoga instructor. At the end of the intervention (after 10 days), we collected data from two self-report psychometrics scales questionnaires.

Socio-demographic details

The socio demographic details such as age, sex, marital status, presence or absence of children, were collected through a telephonic questionnaire. The other details such as work experience, health behaviors, like alcohol intake and smoking habits, were also collected. The earlier history of diseases and medicine used before or during the pandemic phase was also noted. They were also interrogated about digital screen exposure time per day during the lockdown days.

Psychometric questionnaires

Two self-report psychometric questionnaires administered at baseline and after 10 days were the World Health Organization Quality of Life Questionnaire, Brief Version (WHOQOL-BREF) and the DASS-21 (Henry & Crawford, 2005; Wong et al., 2018) . WHOQOL-BREF comprised of 26 questions divided into five domains (physical, psychological, social relationships, environmental wellbeing, and general health perception of quality of life and health) and aimed to evaluate the user's quality of life. In DASS 21, the psychological symptoms are grouped into three domains: anxiety, depression and stress.

Statistical analysis

Demographic details and other data are represented as mean \pm standard deviation (SD). Shapiro-Wilk test was used for the assessment of normal distribution of the data. Before and after OM chanting comparisons were performed by Student's t-test. All statistical analyses were done using R statistical software version 3.4.1. In all cases, differences were considered significant at $p < 0.05$.

Results of the study

Of the 140 users evaluated, 25 (17.8%) were enrolled and 125 (82.2%) did not comply with the eligibility criteria. Of the 25 eligible users that completed the baseline assessment only twenty completed the post assessment. Baseline socio demographic and clinical characteristics of the study groups are described in (Table 1). The majority was male (80%), and the average age was 46 (standard deviation, SD=10.8).

After 10 days of OM chanting, the participants showed significant improvements in general health ($p=0.003$), psychological ($p\leq 0.001$), physical ($p\leq 0.001$), social ($p=0.002$), and environmental wellbeing ($p\leq 0.001$) of quality of life measured by WHOQOL-BREF (Figure 1). They also reported lower levels of depression ($p\leq 0.001$), anxiety

($p=0.010$) and stress ($p=0.004$) analyzed through DASS-21 (Figure 2)

Table 1. Socio-demographic details of the office workers

Variables	Office workers
Age (yrs)	46±10.8
Job experience (yrs)	8.2±3.90
Sex (Male/female)	16/4
<i>Marital status</i>	
Married (n[%])	12(60)
Unmarried (n[%])	4(20)
Separated (n[%])	2(10)
Children (Yes/No)	13/7
Elders (Yes/No)	11/9
Habitual drinkers (n[%])	9(45)
Habitual Smokers (n[%])	11(55)
Screen Exposure time (hrs)	9.4±4.90
Presence of Chronic diseases (n[%])	8 (40)

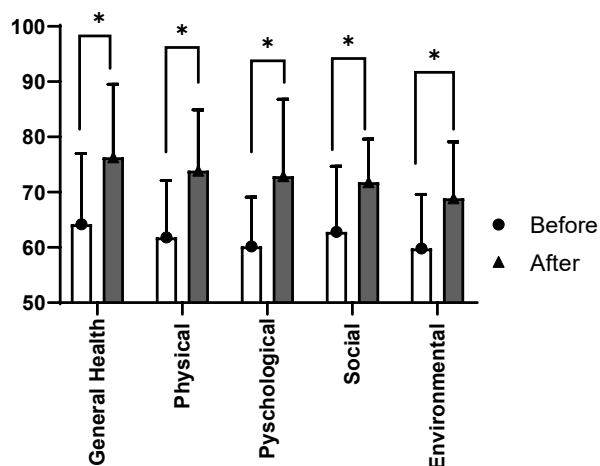


Figure 1. WHOQOL-BREF scale before and after OM chanting (* – $P<0.05$).

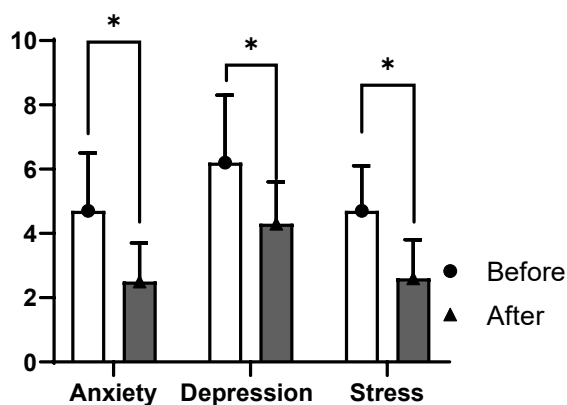


Figure 2. DASS 21 scale before and after OM chanting (* – $P<0.05$).

Discussion

The present study showed that OM chanting through an online mode significantly improved the quality of life and reduced the psychological distress level among the studied office workers. Teleworking is one of the best strategies many companies have adapted to overcome the pandemic crisis, but it can lead to a negative impact on workers' mental health. This kind of teleworking practice can cause the workers to spend more time on the computer because of boundaries between the official and family times are not clear (Henke et al., 2016). In addition to this, the level of mental stress may increase with presence of children and the elderly. Even under normal circumstances, good mental health is crucial to the functioning of society as well for the individuals to maintain healthy life. Previous evidence has proposed that poor mental health could increase susceptibility to infection and transmission of the virus. People with altered mental health might be at high risk of exposure to COVID-19 because of trouble in remembering instructions for physical distancing, protection strategy, and hand hygiene (Holmes et al., 2020). The health care systems are tirelessly working for the effective management of COVID-19. Moreover, the presence of an active mental health management system can moderate the consequences of COVID-19 on workers' mental health (Qiu et al., 2020). The Ministry of AYUSH, Government of India, has already released a list of Yoga to be practiced during the pandemic situation to boost the immunity and mental wellbeing (Tillu et al., 2020). Evidence suggests that yoga can be a suitable approach to improve individual wellness and moderate stress during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. The WHO has also identified the beneficial effect of Yoga in improving the physical activity, mental health and managing the non-communicable diseases (Büssing et al., 2012).

The simple yogic breathing practice of *Sudarshan Kriya* yoga (SKY) for 12 weeks has known to improve the QOL score in HIV positive persons. It has also enhanced overall physical and psychological health (Mawar et al., 2015).

The awareness of simple and feasible practices of meditation in the form of OM chanting can greatly help in bringing down the stress and depression in office workers and also those in the public who are more prone for infection. Obviously, traditional interventions like OM chanting are inexpensive and suitable for all age groups and it has an ability to bring a positive vibration and improve the health conditions. Yoga and meditation have a potential role to engage the community in creating a more positive health environment. Lack of control group and smaller sample size were the major limitations of the present study. The practice duration of OM chanting can be prolonged and further effectiveness can also be monitored. This pilot study has formed a basis to take up more such inexpensive and non-invasive technique for enhancing the qual-

ity of life and psychological wellbeing in office shift workers during COVID-19 pandemic situation. This may be introduced in our country to improve the quality of life and well-being of office shift workers.

Conclusion

OM chanting is a simple and useful practice to be followed on a daily basis for the management of depression during COVID 19 pandemic lockdown in office workers.

Authors Contributions

Conceptualization, J.T, K.M, K.S; methodology, J.T, K.M, K.S; software, M.P, K.G; check, J.T, K.M, M.P and K.G; formal analysis, J.T, K.M, M.P, K.G; investigation, J.T, K.M, K.S; resources, K.M, M.P, K.G; data curation, J.T, K.M, K.S, K.G; writing - rough preparation, J.T, K.M, M.P, K.G; writing - review and editing, J.T, K.M, M.P, K.G; visualization, J.T, K.M, K.S; supervision, J.T, K.M, K.S; project administration, J.T, K.M, K.S; receiving funding, K.G

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and K.M All authors have read and agreed with the published version of the manuscript.

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Conflict of Interest

Authors have declared no conflict of interest.

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Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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