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Effectiveness of Yogic Practices in Reducing Social Inhibition Among School Students

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Abstract

Social inhibition presents a significant barrier to the psychosocial development of school students, hindering academic participation and peer relationships. This paper provides a descriptive analysis of the efficacy of yogic practices as a holistic intervention for mitigating social inhibition. By synthesizing existing research from neuroscience, psychology, and contemplative studies, this paper outlines the theoretical framework through which yoga—comprising physical postures (asanas), breath regulation (pranayama), and mindfulness—can counter the underlying mechanisms of social anxiety. We will describe how these practices work to regulate the autonomic nervous system, improve interoceptive awareness, foster emotional self-regulation, and enhance self-esteem. The paper concludes that the inherent properties of yoga are theoretically well-suited to address social inhibition, positioning it as a valuable, non-pharmacological tool for school-based wellness programs.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Humans evolve through continuous engagement with the novelty in the form of living and non-living entities such as other people, social challenges, new events etc. Children are much more receptive of the novelty than adults. That's why, from an early age, children are placed in an education system designed to support their natural curiosity and aptitude for learning.

Children learn life-skills through continuous social interactions, which play a key role in shaping their cognitive, emotional, and behavioural disposition. From infancy to adolescence, children naturally yearn to engage with others. The Social engagement helps in developing communication skills, emotional regulation, and Problem-solving abilities. That's why they need support of caregivers, teachers and peers to Provide experiences that nurtures their social intelligence. However, since every child is different, not all will thrive in the same social environments, and their development may depend on the nature of these interactions. Due to variations in temperament, not all school-age children can face challenges of rigid educational system. Some students possess innate openness of the disposition, while other might have more anxious disposition. Emotionally open children freely express themselves in the social settings and they can also empathize with the feelings of other people. On the other hand, anxious children remain guarded in the front of any novel experience. They are emotionally inarticulate and often struggle to empathize with other people in social situations.

2. Social Inhibition

Social Inhibition is a psychological occurrence that restrains an individual from exhibiting natural expressions, emotions and behaviours in presence of other people. Such individuals suffer from Social Anxiety and hold a fear of negative judgement in social setting. Such people are excessively self-conscious and they have a tendency of not participating in social exchange and build social relationships. Social Inhibition occurs naturally to some degree in all of humans but various intrinsic and extrinsic factors play a vital role in making it a clinically concerning phenomenon. Social Inhibition covers a wide array of symptoms that often occur in combination with other behavioural disorders and is not classified as a distinct mental health condition. Social Inhibition is a type of anxiety disorder. Anxiety disorders are the prime disorders, which result from excessive fear and worry. In case of Social Inhibition, the symptoms result in acute Social Distress, which affects one's daily social functioning. There are several types of anxiety disorders such as generalized Anxiety disorder, Separation Anxiety disorder, panic attacks, Social Anxiety disorder, etc. Some form of Social Inhibition¹ behaviours are normal part of normal human psychology. However, when this behaviour begins to influence the mental and behavioural functioning of an individual; it becomes a serious cause of concern. Such

behaviours are often differentiated by extreme psychological distress and dysfunction it causes to a social life of a person. The factors, that affect a child's social behaviour are parenting, genetics, environment, socio-economic, physical, health, educational infrastructure, access to facilities, nutrition etc. Social Inhibition causes, clinically significant disruption in emotional regulation Processes, cognitive patterns and social behaviour that impairs their ability to make context appropriate decision, expression and contribution.

The prevalence of Social Inhibition is measured through other related psychological disorders. These are: Social Anxiety disorder causes excessive aversion of social situation and presently it's estimated that nearly 7.1% of the population suffers from this disorder. Selective mutism is a condition in which the children fail to speak in front of other people. Currently 0.03% of world population suffers from this disorder. Shyness and introversion are personality traits that can cause social inhibition although all such people are not Socially inhibited. Social Inhibition is primarily diagnosed through behavioural observation, self-report measures, clinical assessments, and through parents, caregivers or educator's reports.

The Social Inhibition behaviours are exacerbated through some key factors such as; (1) Personality traits 'shyness' and 'introversion' predispose one towards Social Inhibition (2) Early childhood care environment; maternal or caregiver attachment, traumatic experiences, sense of security, etc. can shape one's perception of Social situation (3) Genetics; makes one predisposed towards negative affectivity increasing anxious response in Social situation (4) Cultural expectation and Social norms influence one's willingness to display emotions in Social settings (5) Modelling behaviours of parents, teachers and peers neuroplasticity (6) People having high self-doubt and low self-esteem (7) Traumatic Social experiences such as peer rejection, Social pressure, lack of positive and supporting Social relationships leave one predisposed towards denial of Social experiences Social Inhibition has negative consequences and leaves one vulnerable towards various negative emotions and psychological burden. The emotional impact of Social Inhibition is experienced in the form of Social Anxiety and fears that poses emotional regulation challenges for an individual.

Social Inhibition impairs School student's social development due to which they fail to form meaningful Professional & non-Professional relationships with other people. Such students have low sense self-worth and low self-confidence that keeps them from engaging in society in assistive manner, socially inhibited children also fail to develop empathetic outlook in the life due to lack of social experience. Socially inhibited students have high level of emotional distress, which can transform in even more serious disorders such as Social Anxiety disorder and clinical Depression. Emotional distress leaves Socially inhibited children with negative effectively, which makes them highly vulnerable towards negative emotions, in social setting.

A Socially inhibited child can learn to be more Social by parenting, Social & emotional, skill training, physical activity, access to therapist, quality education, safe family of social

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/childrensmentalhealth/features/Anxiety-Depression-children.html>

environment, being part of supporting group etc. Persisting mental, emotional and behavioural disorders can cause the disability in the adulthood, which creates burden on society as well as economy. That's why it's necessary to identify and cure such Problems as soon as possible. Such disorders are usually treated through psychological therapy and medication or sometimes with combination of the both. Currently therapy is considered most effective method to correct behavioural disorders as it can be adapted according to particular child's need. The trained therapist assesses child's personality and severity of the symptoms before beginning therapy.

3. Yoga

Yoga is a discipline of mind-body-spirit wellness, whose origin can be traced back to Vedic era of ancient India. Early form of Yoga involved various ritual and spiritual practices that were associated with religious activities. Gradually the external practices moved toward more meditative and contemplative aspects of the Yoga. Conventional treatments only take children in account if they display visible signs of the Problem. However Socially inhibited children don't always exhibit discernible symptoms, that's why Yoga based Programs; involving whole classroom, can be more effective in handling behavioural disorders of the students. Yogic interventions can also help in stalling growth of unforeseen behavioural disorders in children. Modern psychology theory is also increasingly emphasizing on the more humanistic² side of the psychology.

Yoga-based Programs in the school can be implemented as comprehensive mental, physical and behavioural care system. Providing Yogic solution in school setting helps in bringing out the solution in familiar environment, which ensures vibrant support systems for the children in addition of reduction in distance and cost of cure. Yoga-based health Programs can be inclusive and comfortable for Socially inhibited individuals, which can fulfil student's mental health needs in familiar environment.

The school years are a formative period for developing social competence. However, for many students, this period is marked by social inhibition, a powerful tendency to withdraw from social situations due to an intense fear of negative judgment. This condition can severely limit a student's educational experience, leading to poor class participation, difficulty forming friendships, and an increased risk for long-term mental health challenges like anxiety and depression.

While clinical interventions exist, there is a growing interest in accessible, school-based programs that promote holistic well-being. Yoga, an ancient mind-body discipline, emerges as a particularly promising approach, with research on its implementation in schools growing significantly over the past two decades.³ It is not merely a form of physical exercise; it is

an integrated practice designed to foster harmony between the mind and body. This paper will descriptively analyze the key components of yoga to build a theoretical case for its effectiveness in alleviating the physiological and psychological symptoms of social inhibition in students.

4. Theoretical Framework: Mechanisms of Action

The efficacy of yoga in reducing social inhibition can be understood by examining its impact on the neurobiological and psychological systems that drive social anxiety.

4.1. Physiological Regulation via Asana and Pranayama

Social inhibition is fundamentally linked to a hyperactive sympathetic nervous system—the body's "fight-or-flight" response. When a student feels socially threatened, their body may react with a racing heart, shallow breathing, and muscle tension. Yogic practices directly intervene in this process.

- **Asana (Physical Postures):** The physical practice of holding yoga poses helps release stored muscular tension associated with anxiety. Additionally, studies suggest that mind-body practices can help regulate the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis, leading to lower levels of the stress hormone cortisol over time.⁴

- **Pranayama (Breath Regulation):** Controlled, deep breathing is proven to stimulate the vagus nerve, which activates the parasympathetic nervous system, or the "rest-and-digest" state.⁵ This provides students with a direct tool to manage anxiety. Furthermore, studies suggest that yogic breathing and postures can increase the levels of the calming neurotransmitter GABA, which is often deficient in individuals with anxiety disorders.⁶

4.2. Psychological Restructuring via Mindfulness and Interoception

Social inhibition is maintained by cognitive patterns of negative self-talk and rumination. The mindfulness component of yoga addresses these patterns directly.

- **Mindfulness and Decentering:** Yoga trains students to observe their thoughts from a distance, without judgment. This process, known as "decentering," allows a student to recognize that an anxious thought is just a mental event, not a fact.

⁴ Kamei, T., Toriumi, Y., Kimura, H., Ohno, S., Kumano, H., & Kimura, K. (2000). Decrease in serum cortisol during yoga exercise is correlated with alpha wave activation. *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, 90(3), 1027-1032.

⁵ Brown, R. P., & Gerbarg, P. L. (2005). Sudarshan Kriya yogic breathing in the treatment of stress, anxiety, and depression: Part I - neurophysiologic model. *The Journal of Alternative & Complementary Medicine*, 11(1), 189-201.

⁶ Streeter, C. C., Gerbarg, P. L., Saper, R. B., Ciraulo, D. A., & Brown, R. P. (2012). Effects of yoga on the autonomic nervous system, gamma-aminobutyric-acid, and allostasis in epilepsy, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder. *Medical Hypotheses*, 78(5), 571-579.

² Rosenberg, Robin., Kosslyn, Stephen (2014), *Abnormal Psychology*. United States: Worth Publishers, 2014. P-12

³ Khalsa, S. B. S., & Butzer, B. (2016). Yoga in school settings: A research review. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1373(1), 45-55.

- **Interoception (Body Awareness):** Yoga cultivates a heightened awareness of internal bodily sensations. Improved interoception is linked to better emotional regulation, as it allows individuals to notice the early physical signs of anxiety and respond proactively.⁷
- **Self-Esteem and Self-Compassion:** The non-competitive nature of yoga allows for personal growth and a sense of mastery. As a student progresses in their practice, they build self-efficacy. This aligns with the concept of self-compassion, which involves treating oneself with kindness and understanding, particularly in moments of perceived failure—a critical skill for students who fear social judgment.⁸

5. Implications for School-Based Programs

Based on this analysis, incorporating yoga into the school curriculum offers a powerful strategy for supporting students. Such programs fall within the broader, evidence-based framework of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), which has been shown to improve students' social skills, attitudes, and academic performance.⁹ A school-based yoga program can create a safe, non-competitive social environment. In this setting, students can practice being in a group while focusing on their own experience, providing a form of gentle and supportive social exposure.

6. CONCLUSION

The practice of yoga is a multifaceted discipline that addresses the root causes of social inhibition at physiological and psychological levels. Through the regulation of the stress response, the cultivation of mindful awareness, and the development of self-compassion, it provides students with the internal resources needed to navigate social challenges. The descriptive evidence strongly supports the theoretical basis for using yoga within school systems to foster a more socially confident and emotionally balanced student population.

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⁷ Craig, A. D. (2002). How do you feel? Interoception: the sense of the physiological condition of the body. *Nature Reviews Neuroscience*, 3(8), 655-666.

⁸ Neff, K. (2003). Self-compassion: An alternative conceptualization of a healthy attitude toward oneself. *Self and Identity*, 2(2), 85-101.

⁹ Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., & Schellinger, K. B. (2011). The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. *Child Development*, 82(1), 405-432.