

# Yoga in school-aged children: Impact on children's mental health and well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic

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## Background

According to NHS figures 1 in 8 child in the UK had some form of mental health diagnosis in 2017. This increased the demand for mental health interventions, which costs the health service close to £3 billion every year. There has been an increase in risk factors for poor mental health amongst children during the COVID-19 pandemic. With the current COVID-19 pandemic innovative and targeted interventions are essential in supporting children during these difficult times.

**The impact of Covid-19 on child mental health**

- Social Isolation
- Reduced outdoor activities
- Routine disruptions
- Relationship problems
- Family bereavement
- Increase in stress
- Uncertainty regarding education
- Future opportunities

(Golberstein et al., 2020, Newlove-Delgado et al., 2021, Unicef, 2020)

## Methods

**Objective:** Evaluate the effectiveness of an online, developmentally appropriate yoga intervention, and assess the impact of the intervention on mental health within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and compare the mental health impact to the National Health Service (NHS) data.

- *Yoga for Youth* was created by Patanjali Yog Peeth (UK) Trust specifically for school-aged children during March 2020 and is ongoing.
- Intervention includes yoga poses, breathing practice and relaxation - 1-hour, weekly sessions.
- Parents of participating school-aged children (5-16 years) who live in the UK are eligible to take part

**Study Design** - Uses a mixed-methods approach – Parents completed Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) online

- A subsample is then interviewed using a structured interview schedule online using open ended questions.
- Quantitative surveys are compared against the Mental Health of Children and Young People (MHCYP) survey by NHS digital (2020).



## Preliminary Results:

- A total of 167 parents completed the SDQ online, and 14 parents were interviewed between July 2020 to Sept 2021. Data collection is on-going – 62 participant responses have been analysed
- Intervention group appear to be doing better on all measures.
- Parents reported several benefits of the group classes, including feeling part of a community, and children seemed motivated to practice yoga.

Thematic Analysis from the preliminary qualitative interviews

SDQ Scales	Yoga Intervention	National Data for ethnic minorities 2020 <sup>1</sup>
Mean emotional problems score	1.3	2.0
Mean conduct problems score	0.8	1.1
Mean hyperactivity problems score	2.9	3.3
Mean peer problems score	1.3	1.8
Mean prosocial behaviours score	8.6	8.3
Mean total difficulties score	6.5	8.2
Mean impact score	0.03	0.4
Sample Size Total	62	460

1. Mental Health of Children and Young People in England, 2020 Wave 1 follow up to the 2017 survey (NHS, 2020)

## Conclusion

Preliminary results of this study suggest that children practising yoga have reported fewer adverse mental health problems compared to the national data, and parents have encouraged their children to participate.

