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YOGA IN THE CONTEXT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: A TOOL TO PROMOTE

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Abstract: Introduction: in Brasil, Yoga was introduced in the country less than 100 years ago, through pioneer Caio Miranda. Despite not being so widespread, today it is already considered an Integrative Practice in Health that aims at the integral care of the human being. In Yoga, it is understood that pathologies that arise in the physical body can be associated with emotional weaknesses, as well as the psychological state can be changed by diseases of the physical body. In this sense, it was considered important to implement the practice of Yoga online, as a health promotion practice, in the current pandemic context. **Objectives:** to describe the health promotion experience with Yoga and its benefits during social isolation. **Methodological Description:** report of experience of regular practice of yoga, online, offered by an instructor to a fixed group of students. The sample consisted of 12 students, aged between 25 and 65 years, all at a beginner level as they had never practiced yoga regularly. Classes were synchronous and offered by the ZOOM platform, twice a week, from March/2020 to March/2021. **Results:** students report that Yoga has had positive impacts on their lives, increasing tolerance for social isolation, as well as reducing insomnia, anxiety, panic and chronic body pain. Some students went through family grief and reported that the practice of asanas, pranayamas and meditative practices helped in emotional control and in the process of coping with experiential grief. Four members of the group contracted COVID-19, with mild to moderate symptoms, and used meditation and breathing practice as a complement to medical treatment. **Considerations:** Teaching an Integrative Practice in Health, in times of a pandemic, contributed to these people being able to experience a new tool to search for physical and mental balance.

Keywords: Yoga, Health promotion, Pandemics, COVID-19.

INTRODUCTION

Classical Yoga is a philosophical system and an Indian psychophysical practice that aims to promote the connection of the being with its essence, through the absence of mental oscillations. It was systematized by the Hindu master Patanjali, who described 8 steps for the practice of Classical Yoga: 1) yama, the abstinences (non-violence, truthfulness, honesty, non-perversion of sex, detachment); 2) niyama, the rules of life (purity, harmony, serenity, joy, study); 3) asanas, the body positions; 4) pranayama, breath control; 5) pratyahara, control of organic sensory perceptions; 6) dharana, concentration; 7) dhyana, meditation; and 8) samadhi, identification (Barros,2014).

In Brasil, Yoga arrived in the mid-1950s, less than 100 years ago, through the pioneer Caio Miranda who taught yoga in Rio de Janeiro. Despite being recent the entrance of Yoga in the country, and the scarcity of studies in the field of collective health, from the point of view of integral care and health promotion, it is noticeable a growing interest of the population for the practice.

The first International Conference on Health Promotion, in 1986 in Ottawa, defined health promotion as a process of empowering the community to act to improve its quality of life and health, considering that to achieve a complete state of physical and mental well-being, groups and individuals need to be able to identify aspirations, meet needs, and favorably modify their environment. Understanding, also, that health should be seen as a resource for life and not as a goal for living.

Thus, in 2002, the OMS cites Yogac as a practice of complementary and alternative medicine, and in 2010, publishes the World Recommendations on Physical Activity for Health, referring to Yoga as a physical activity that enhances health (OMS, 2010).

Today, the world faces harsh repercussions from the SARS-COV-2/COVID-19 pandemic. The poor knowledge of the new coronavirus, its rapid spread, and the high number of deaths have led the authorities in many countries to implement a series of interventions to reduce the transmission of the virus and prevent the worsening of the pandemic.

In Brasil, the pandemic found the Brazilian population in real vulnerability, with high unemployment rates and deep cuts in social policies. Studies evaluating the impacts of social isolation on mental and physical health caused by COVID-19 are still preliminary, but such repercussions were described in a study of 1210 respondents from 194 cities in China about the beginning of the pandemic in 2019. In addition to the impact related to fear of illness, 53.8% of respondents rated the psychological impact of the outbreak as moderate or severe (Wang, 2019).

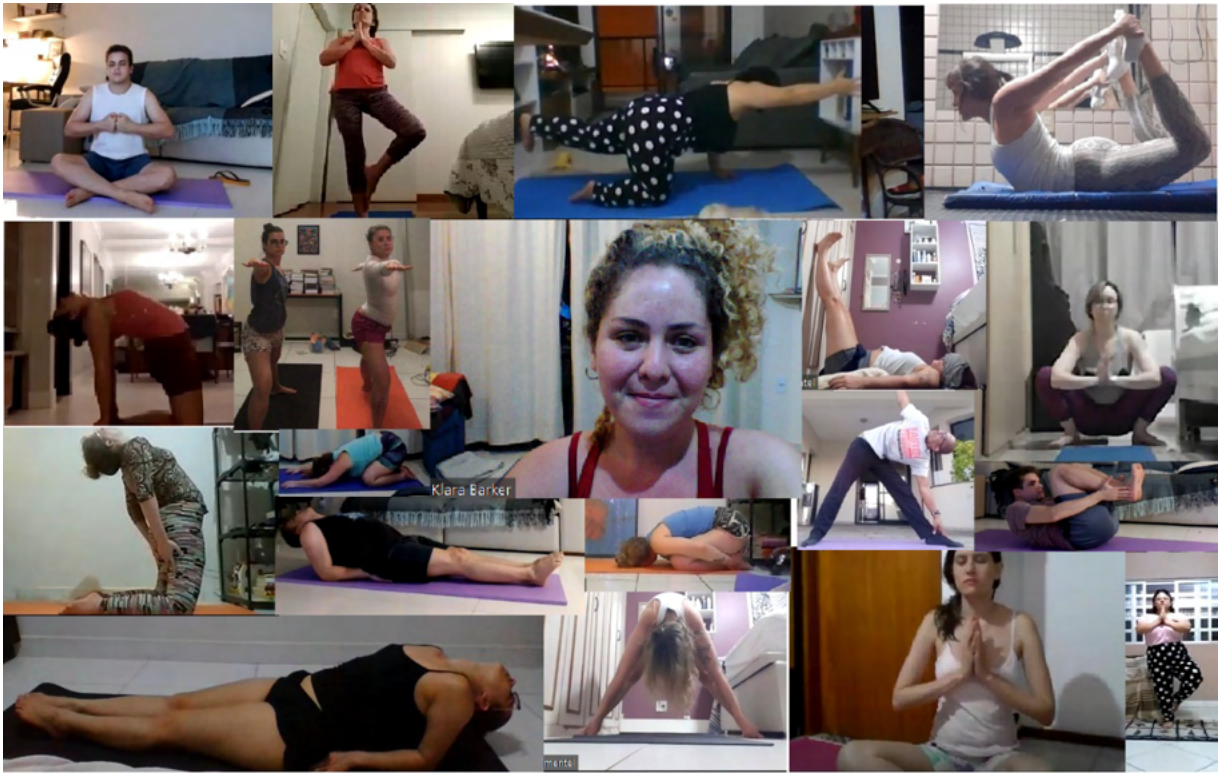
In this conjuncture, this study is justified by the incipiency of studies on Yoga in Brasil, and by the acute and emerging public health problem related to the pandemic of COVID-19. The main objective of this research is to analyze the self-declared well-being of people who practiced Yoga during the social isolation period, and its relationship with health promotion and reestablishment of healthy habits during the pandemic.

Although the quantitative aspects of a research are relevant, in this context a qualitative methodology is proposed with a focus on non-measurable aspects, favoring conditions for understanding the experience of the subjects and building knowledge about the investigated theme. This article intends to describe the experience of health promotion with Yoga and its benefits during social isolation. Methodology: experience report of regular yoga practice, online, offered by an instructor to a fixed group of students. The sample was composed by

12 students, aged between 25 and 65 years old, all of them in a beginner level because they had never practiced yoga regularly. The classes were synchronous and offered by the ZOOM platform, twice a week, during the period from March/2020 to March/2021. A Yoga reading group was also formed, with monthly meetings to discuss the book *Self Perfection with Hatha Yoga* by the author Hermógenes.

RESULTS

Students report that Yoga has had positive impacts on their lives, increasing their tolerance for social isolation, as well as, reducing insomnia, anxiety, panic, and chronic bodily pain. Some students have experienced family bereavement and report that the asana, pranayama, and meditation practices have helped in emotional control and in the process of coping with experiential grief. Yoga helped them in self-knowledge, breathing and body awareness, as well as in the expansion of their spirituality. New habits and possibilities of self-care were observed among the participants, such as fasting, using cold baths, reducing beef consumption, and practicing Indian philosophical concepts. Four members of the group had covid-19, with mild to moderate symptoms, and used meditation and breathing practice in a way that complemented medical treatment. Teaching an Integrative Health Practice in times of pandemic helped these people to experience a new tool to seek physical and mental balance. During this period there were numerous reports of increased feelings of vitality, contentment, gratitude, and happiness. And, despite the desire for face-to-face contact, it is noted that the online modality expanded access and promoted the union of people from different locations, as well as provided the construction of bonds of friendship during the pandemic.



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