

Yoga for chess players in ‘Chess Olympiad 2022’: A brief qualitative research report on public health initiative in Tamil Nadu, India

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Abstract

In collaboration with the Tamil Nadu government, the All-India Chess Federation hosted the 44th FIDE Chess Olympiad at Mamallapuram, Tamil Nadu, India from 28th July to 10th August 2022. The event witnessed the participation of around 1,700 players, officials, and volunteers from 187 countries. The declaration of June 21st as the International Day of Yoga by the United Nations Organization gave the most needed global recognition for Yoga in recent years. With this global recognition, the Tamil Nadu government introduced Yoga and Meditation yoga practices for stress management, improving concentration and attention span among chess players. There were media reports that this is the first time in the history of ‘the Chess Olympiad’, Yoga was officially introduced to the players. We explored how Yoga sessions were implemented for chess players and conducted qualitative interviews with Yoga and Naturopathy doctors who offered the intervention to the chess players. For this, we identified 5 Yoga and Naturopathy doctors using the snowball sampling technique, who were involved in administering Yoga to the chess players and conducted qualitative semi-structured interviews with them. The interviews were manually coded independently by the researcher. The major themes evolved: public health manpower, Yoga service provision, and feedback from players with a sub-theme perceived benefit of Yoga.

Key words: Yoga, Chess Olympiad, Public health, Tamil Nadu

Introduction:

In collaboration with the Tamil Nadu government, the All-India Chess Federation hosted the 44th FIDE Chess Olympiad at Mamallapuram, Tamil Nadu, India from 28th July to 10th August 2022. The event witnessed the participation of

around 1,700 players, officials, and volunteers from 187 countries. The declaration of June 21st as the International Day of Yoga by the United Nations Organization gave the most needed global recognition for Yoga in

recent years. With this global recognition, the Tamil Nadu government introduced Yoga and Meditation yoga practices for stress management, improving concentration and attention span among chess players. There were media reports that this is the first time in the history of 'the Chess Olympiad', Yoga was officially introduced to the players(1). We explored how Yoga sessions were implemented for chess players and conducted qualitative interviews with Yoga and Naturopathy doctors who offered the intervention to the chess players.

Method:

We identified 5 Yoga and Naturopathy doctors using the snowball sampling technique, who were involved in administering Yoga to the chess players and conducted qualitative semi-structured interviews with them. The interviews were manually coded independently by the researcher.

Results and Discussion:

The major themes evolved: public health manpower, Yoga service provision, and feedback from players with a sub-theme perceived benefit of Yoga.

1. Public health human resources utilized for Yoga implementation:

A team of around 50 Yoga & Naturopathy doctors from Government Yoga and Naturopathy Medical College & Hospital, Arumbakkam, Tamil Nadu, were deputed to every accommodation venue of players from 28th July 2022 to 10th August 2022 between 8 am to 12 pm.

2. Yoga service provision

Chess involves ability and non-ability traits related with performance because it bears intellectual and emotionally demanding requirements. Earlier studies have demonstrated enhanced attention and concentration, alleviate anxiety(2), better performance, awareness(3) and improved shooting ability(4) following yoga in archery sports. Cognitive ability being a major determinant in chess(5), yoga practices might facilitate handling emotionally demanding scenarios before and during the sport.

Doctors reported that '*An evidence-based approach has been followed and they designed a customised Yoga sessions which included Yoga asana, Pranayama, Meditation, Lifestyle and Diet counseling focussing on managing stress and anxiety amongst players*'

3. Players Feedback

Doctors who were directly involved in administering Yoga session for the players received written feedback from the players and they shared the report with the researcher. One of the Doctor reported that '*Yoga sessions were well received by the players, the feedback by the players provided lots of insights into understanding the acceptance and use of Yoga globally. The players were very receptive for Yoga session and they said that it helped them in relieving physical and mental fatigue and helped them to participate with more attention and enthusiasm*'.

3.1. Exposure to Yoga

Doctors reported that for many players that was their first Yoga practice session because either Yoga is not available in their country or it is a very

costly affair. Players from many countries in their feedback also reported this was their first exposure to Yoga.

'This was my first ever Yoga session, I got exposed to breathing exercises, and relaxation techniques, it was very relaxing and I loved it. I hope I will practice whatever I learned here daily when I go back to my country'

3.2. Perceived benefits of Yoga

Doctors mentioned that 'the players reported that their experience with Yoga was highly invigorating and indeed reduced their stress, increased their awareness and concentration'. Evidence suggests that yoga practices modulate the way the brain recognizes stress (both acute and chronic) in the cortico-limbic system and improve regulation of the sympathetic nervous system through the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal system. These are translated to a reduction in evening cortisol, waking cortisol, ambulatory systolic blood pressure, resting heart rate, high-frequency heart rate variability, fasting blood glucose, cholesterol, and low-density lipoprotein, compared to active control(6).

Players reported that *'I am blessed to have this relaxation feeling after being stressed out from my game'*; *'I joined the session*

for the first time, it was helpful in releasing stress and felt relaxed'; *'I feel calm and extremely relaxed after every session'*; *'I felt relaxed, and never had so much attention and awareness on every part of my body'*.

Conclusion:

The recognition of Yoga as a tool for stress management by the Government of Tamil Nadu provided an opportunity for many international chess player to experience Yoga. Notably, it is the only state that provides Yoga therapy and general yoga in more than 180 public health facilities free of cost for maternity care, NCD care, and general health promotion, from primary health centers to Government medical college hospitals through Yoga and Naturopathy Medical graduates. It is evident that still there is an unmet need for adapting Yoga as a lifestyle and therapy globally. With appropriate designing of curricula and common practical techniques, a country-specific approach, the Government of India can formulate a policy for taking Yoga & Naturopathy into Global market emphasising the role of healthy living, prevention, management, and rehabilitation of common non-communicable diseases and also increase the revenue and economy of its own.

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