



Effect of a 6-week Yoga & Meditation Program on Medical Students' Stress Levels & Sense of Well Being Prior to Taking Exams

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Introduction



Stress amongst medical students is an essential response for academic achievement. Beyond certain levels and with continued exposure to various stressors, the physical and mental health of medical students may be negatively impacted. Yoga & meditation have proven to be effective in stress management.

The primary aim of this study was to determine whether incorporating the practice of yoga in the medical school curriculum for the duration of a 6 week period, would enable medical students to reduce perceived stress and experience an improvement in personal well being prior to taking their exams.

Methods

This was a prospective case-control study performed at an academic institution between 2013-2015.

1. Recruitment

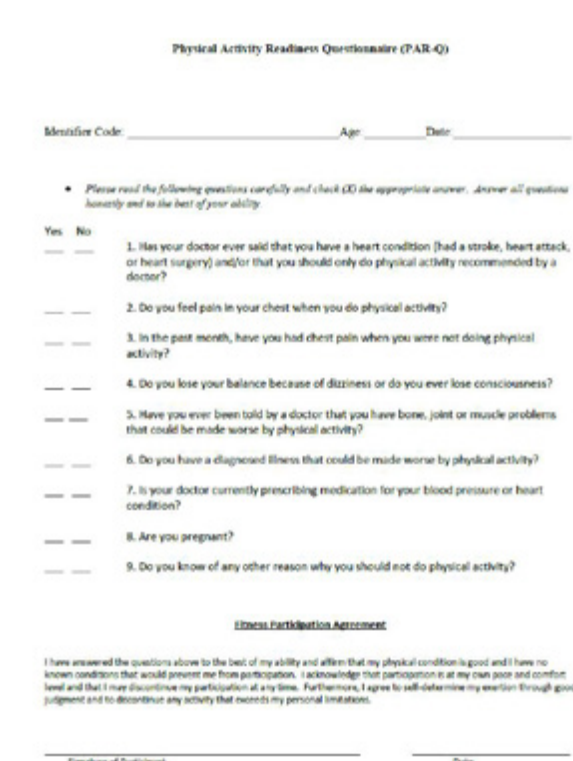
First through third year medical students were recruited by email.

2. Intake Process

Subjects were eligible to participate if they had engaged in less than one year of yoga and meditation and if they hadn't practiced weekly in the preceding three months.

3. Fitness

Participants met wellness criteria determined by the physical activity readiness questionnaire.



4. Participation

Consent forms were completed on initial contact. Participants attended 2 one hour sessions/week for 6-weeks led by a certified yoga instructor. This included:



40 minutes of physical postures



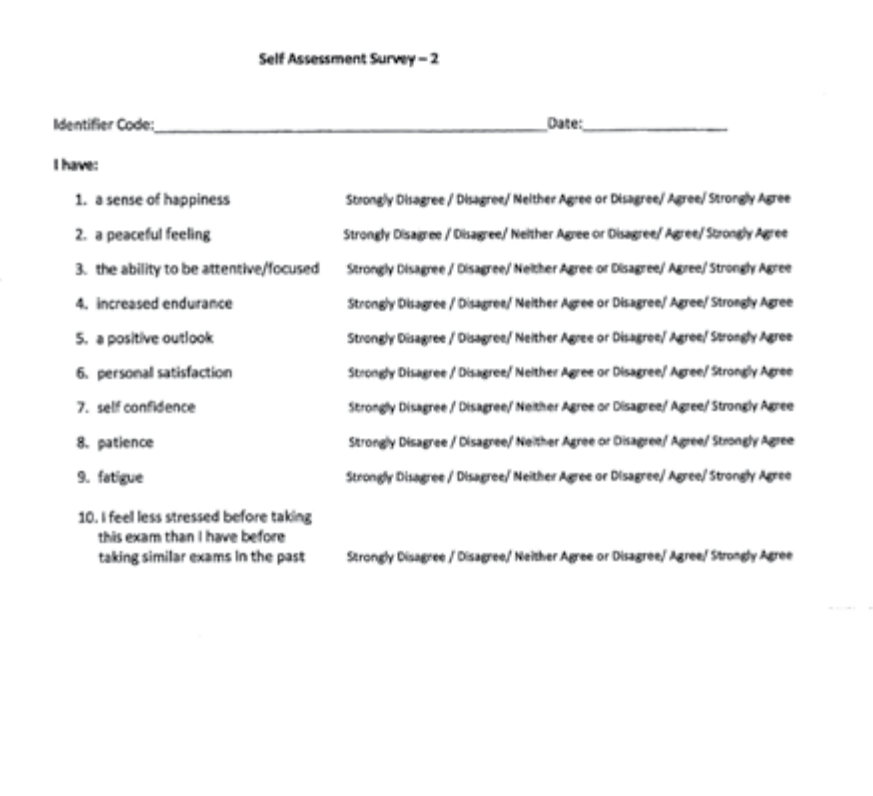
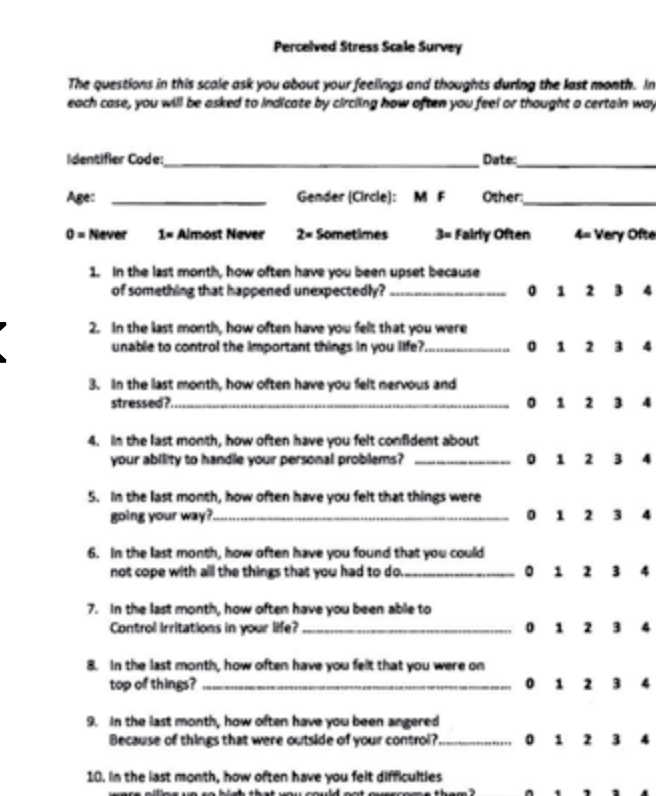
10 minutes of breathing exercises



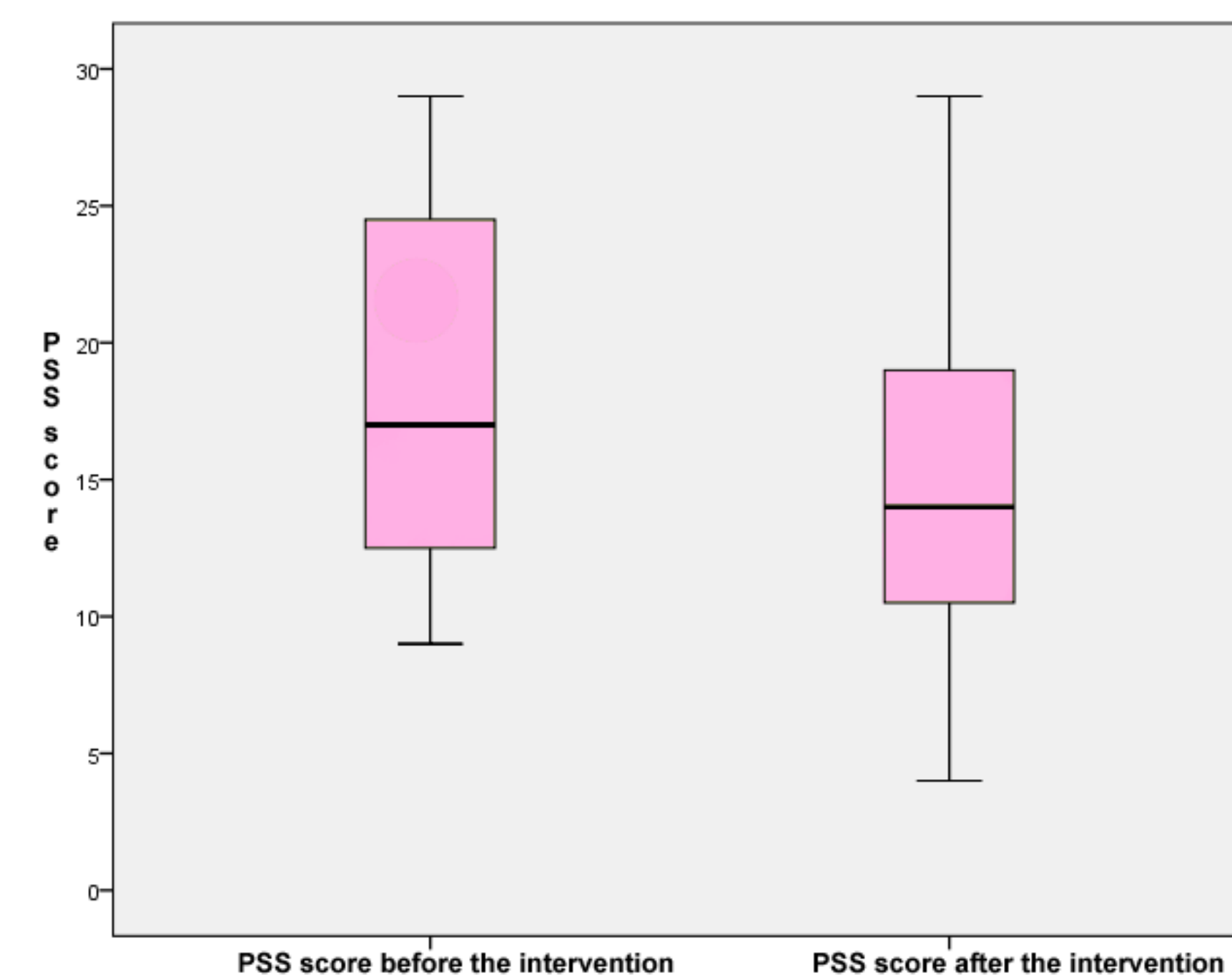
10 minutes of meditation

5. Surveys

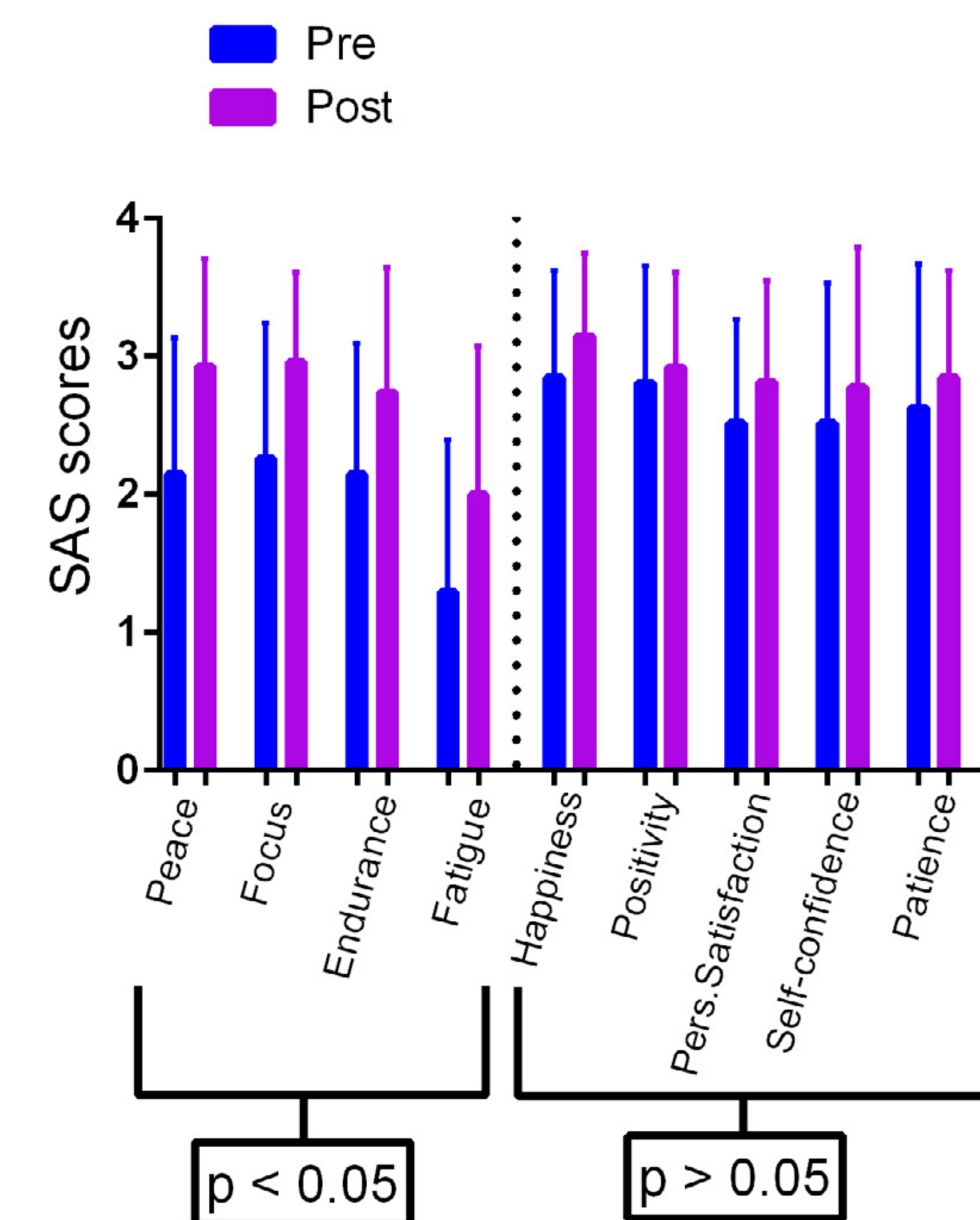
Perceived stress was measured pre- and post- the 6 week intervention, with the latter completed right before their written exam using the Perceived Stress Scale. A Self Assessment Survey was completed pre- and post- the 6 week intervention to measure sense of well being. Components of this survey assessed happiness, peace, focus, endurance, positivity, personal satisfaction, self confidence, patience & fatigue.



Results



There were 27 participants; 13 female & 14 male. Median age was 28 (24yrs-32yrs). 48.1% Caucasian, 7.4% Black, 11.1% Hispanic, 11.1% Asian & 22.2% other. Participants attended 12 sessions. Paired t tests showed 6 weeks of yoga & meditation significantly lowered perceived stress (18.44 vs 14.52; p = 0.004).



The Wilcoxon signed-rank test showed a significant improvement in feelings of peace, focus, endurance & fatigue. No significant changes in happiness, positivity, personal satisfaction, self confidence or patience were seen.

Conclusion

- Yoga & meditation positively affected stress levels & improved aspects of personal well being in the sample population.
- A yoga & meditation program may enable medical students to decrease perceived stress, potentially improving their performance in training.
- A future larger study incorporating a control group may help validate these results.

References

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Disclosure Information

The authors have nothing to disclose.