#### Chapter - 13

# YOGA AS A THERAPEUTIC INTERVENTION AND SELF-CARE TOOL FOR SOCIAL WORKERS: CONSIDERATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

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## Abstract

In 2011, the National Institutes of Health classified voga as a form of complementary and alternative medicine. The same year, the United Nations General Assembly also adopted a resolution declaring June 21 as the International Dav of Yoga to raise awareness of the various benefits of practicing yoga. In modern times, Yoga is recognized as a matter of philosophy, psychology, and a method of self-improvement. In recent years, yoga has been exclusively used to explore diverse physical and mental ailments such as rheumatoid arthritis, depression, heart disease, and neurology. Although the therapeutic value of yoga is recognized and yoga practice is rising in popularity, research exploring the inclusion of voga as a holistic embodied practice in social work practice and education is limited. Grounded in mindfulness-to-meaning theory as a theoretical framework, this chapter explores how social workers can use various voga methods as a holistic intervention and self-care tool in their personal and professional practices. Yoga can be an intervention for physical and mental therapeutic effects and a biopsychosocial dysregulation tool for overall wellness. The chapter highlights the importance of voga as a complementary

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therapeutic intervention in social work practice and thus urges to incorporate yoga in social work education.

#### Keywords: Yoga, mindfulness, meditation, breathing methods, social work practice, social work education

## Introduction

In September 1893, Swami Vivekananda, the first-ever Indian yogi monk in the record to have visited North America, introduced Hinduism, yoga philosophy, and its teachings and practices at the World Parliament of Religions conference held at the Art Institute of Chicago, USA, (Braybrooke, 2012). At the conference, he demonstrated different yoga poses and explained their benefits to the general North American population for the first time, receiving credit for officially introducing yoga to North America. Swami Vivekananda presented yoga as a matter of philosophy, psychology, and method of self-improvement (Deslippe, 2019) rather than how yoga practice has developed as a popular form of physical exercise for flexibility in North America in modern times.

With the turn of the 21st century, yoga's potential as a tool for overall wellness, an intervention for physical and mental therapeutic effects, and biopsychosocial dysregulation was recognized. In 2011, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) classified yoga as a form of complementary and alternative medicine and provided grants to study its therapeutic effects on many different ailments and conditions (Woodyard, 2011). In December 2011, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution declaring June 21 as the International Day of Yoga to raise awareness of the various benefits of practicing yoga. In recent years, yoga has been used to explore diverse physical and mental ailments such as rheumatoid arthritis (Ye et al., 2020), addiction recovery (Kuppili et al., 2018), depression (Sathyanarayanan et al., 2019), cancer care (Agarwal & Maroko-Afek, 2018), chronic asthma (Cramer et al., 2019),

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup>Hinduism is a philosophy on the way of living life practiced by people from Hindu Kush Valley. It is an indigenous spiritual philosophy of Hindu Kush Valley people. Therefore, Hindu is a geographical identity, not a religious one. The 'ism' was added to Hindu in around 1830 (Flood, 1990, p. 6), when British colonial government defined all those people who were not following any other religion such as Islam (Reporter, 2018). In modern times, the word Hinduism is variously defined as a 'religious, ' 'set of religious beliefs and practices,' 'religious tradition,'' 'a way of life'' (Sharma 2003, pp. 12–13).

HIV/AIDS (Dunne et al., 2019), heart disease (Srihari Sharma et al., 2019), pain management (Pearson et al., 2020), and neurology (van Aalst et al., 2020). Bessel van der Kolk, the Co-Founder of the Trauma Research Foundation, has been using yoga as an adjunctive treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder, resulting in a significant decrease in PTSD symptoms in both men and women participants (Price et al., 2017; van der Kolk et al., 2014).

As studies show the therapeutic benefits of yoga, the popularity of yoga and yoga-related activities has increased each year (Harris, 2019; Wei, 2016) in North America. For example, the 2019 Canadian Fitness Industry Trends Survey revealed that about one in five Canadians regularly practice yoga (Harris, 2019). The percentage was even higher, at 35%, among the 18 to 53 age group (Harris, 2019). Similarly, Wei (2016) highlights a survey conducted by Yoga Alliance and Yoga Journal, which reported that the number of Americans doing yoga grew exponentially, from 20.4 million in 2012 to over 36 million in 2016.

Although the therapeutic value of yoga is recognized and yoga practice is rising in popularity, "research exploring the inclusion of yoga as a holistic embodied practice in social work is limited" (Mensinga, 2021, p. 135). A few academic works and emerging research have investigated yoga intervention techniques and methods to enhance clinical social work practices (Decker et al., 2019; Turner, 2009), community engagements (Davis-Berman & Farkas, 2013), and incorporation of yoga practices in social work education (Crisp & Beddoe, 2013; Dash, 2018). A few studies have also explored how social workers understand yoga and integrate it into their personal and professional practices (Collins, 2021; Decker et al., 2019; Lynn & Mensinga, 2015; Mensinga, 2021). However, no cohesiveness or structured yoga practice is promoted and advocated in social work education, social work care, and professional practices. Grounded in mindfulness-to-meaning theory as a theoretical framework, this chapter explores how social workers can use various yoga methods as a holistic intervention and self-care tool in their personal and professional practices. The chapter, thus, highlights the need for yoga to be incorporated into social work pedagogy and education.

#### Mindfulness-to-meaning theory

Tan and Keng (2019) state that mindfulness has its roots in several Eastern philosophical and spiritual traditions. However, mindfulness became popular and began to be more broadly applied in Western medicine and psychology when Joh Kabat-Zinn first developed and introduced an 8-week mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) program based on intensive formal and informal mindfulness meditation practices in the early 1980s (Tan & Keng, 2019). Subsequently, various mindfulness programs and models, such as Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional model for stress and coping based on mindfulness, the cybernetic model of mindfulness (Garland, 2007) and the mindful coping model (Garland et al., 2015) arrived and became the precursor to the mindfulness-to-meaning theory (MMT). The MMT expands on these early mindfulness models by going beyond coping techniques to finding meaning in the mindfulness process by using a dual mechanism of "reappraisal and savouring" (Garland et al., 2015, p. 378). Dr. Eric Garland, who is at the forefront of conceptualizing and studying MMT. defines MMT as:

The mindfulness-to-meaning theory asserts that mindfulness allows one to decentre from stress appraisals into a metacognitive state of awareness that broadens attention to previously unnoticed pieces of information about one's life, accommodating a reappraisal (i.e., a reframing) of adverse circumstances that reduces distress and promotes positive emotions. This reappraisal is then deepened and enriched when one savours what is pleasant, growth-promoting, or meaningful in life, a process which motivates values-driven behaviour and engenders a deeper sense of purpose and self-actualization. (Garland, 2015, para. 1)

In other words, the MMT has (as shown in Figure 1) four key conceptual elements. The first one is the use of curiosity while practicing awareness. Rather than just noticing or being aware of what is happening, one can make mindfulness practice more meaningful by being curious about what is happening within us, our bodies, and our minds (Garland et al., 2015). The second conceptual element is acceptance. But practicing acceptance, according to Garland et al. (2017), does not mean being devoid of emotions. The MMT encourages mindfully cultivating love, self-compas-

sion, and kindness while practicing mindfulness to cultivate positive emotions (Garland et al., 2017).



Figure 1. The main four conceptual elements of MMT

The other two conceptual elements of MMT are reappraisal and savouring. Using the previous two elements, curiosity, and acceptance, MMT encourages de-centring from the stressful situation, stepping back, and reappraising the situation more positively (Garland, 2015, para. 1). Mindful reappraising could mean finding positive meaning in an adverse event or reevaluating and finding a new interpretation of the situation. In a study by Garland et al. (2017), MMT was employed with cancer survivors to improve participants' emotional regulation capacity. After engaging in the mindful reappraisal process, one participant stated, "I think this makes me understand better or makes me feel a bit more capable of getting through something like this" (p. 7). Garland (2015) states when mindful reappraising deepens, the capacity to cultivate positive emotions improves, leading to the savouring of life. Savouring is a "pleasant, growth-promoting, or life-meaning promoting process that motivates values-driven behaviour and engenders a more profound sense of purpose and self-actualization." (Garland, 2015, para.1). Savouring phenomenon deepens the understanding of the meaning of life, which "is detected by the active engagement in pursuing a sense of purpose and meaning and looking inward rather than searching outward" (Garland et al. 2017, p. 4).

Compared to other mindfulness techniques and models, MMT claims to have effective quality, leading to broader engagement and satisfaction in life (Garland, 2015). However, its two key conceptual elements contradict each other. MMT advocates nonjudgmental acceptance of the situation and, at the same time, encourages participants to reappraise and look at adverse circumstances with a new positive perspective. Reappraisal is the antithesis of acceptance. Also, it is challenging to measure meaning in life as the meaning of life could change depending on an individual's position and circumstance.

Another model that engages in the appraisal and reappraisal of difficult and threatening situations is the transactional model of stress and coping (TMSC) proposed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984). The TMSC model investigates individuals' capacity to cope and adapt to challenges and difficulties, which the model argues is due to interactions between a person and their environment (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The TMSC has a few limitations. Conceptualizing stress and coping processes in a transactional method of demand (stressful events) and supply (coping skills) is too vague and simplified to understand life situations, problems and challenges. An individual's internal conflict and challenges are difficult to address as only external environmental stressors are considered in this model. TMSC is more critical of interpreting stress than the event itself, in which case stress could be overanalysed, which might not be the case in reality. There is no distinction between the primary and secondary appraisal processes, and the two layers of the appraisal process could easily overlap. In addition, TMSC is best used as a stress management and coping strategy (Gregory, 2015) rather than as a tool for self-care and reflexivity.

Mindfulness is one of the core elements of yoga practice. Out of 196 aphorisms in the Patanjali Yoga Sutra, 51 are on contemplations, self-inquiry, and understanding the nature of the mind and its capacity (Satchidnananda, 2012). Yogic philosophy aligns with MMT in that both MMT and yoga encourage practitioners to detect the meaning of life from within rather than searching outside (Garland 2015). The strength of MMT's reappraisal process is that it focuses on cultivating positive emotions by stepping back and seeking positive meaning in stressful situations. Nurturing the MMT reappraisal skill could benefit social workers in managing occupational burnout and compassion fatigue.

## Historical overview of yoga

Roots of Yoga (Mallinson & Singleton, 2017) has provided a historical overview of yoga, categorizing the timeline of yoga philosophies, texts and critical figures into four main categories. The first period is the pre-classical period (c. 1500-c. 500 BEC), where extensive voga practice instructions, according to Prabhu and Bhat (2013), were focused on developing non-dual perception and transcending the mind's limitations. Then, the classical period arrived at 184 BC to 148 BC, with five classical philosophies introducing matter-spirit dualism in yoga philosophy and practices (Mass, n.d.). This is the period when a philosopher and a sage named Patanjali compiled the already existing ideas of yoga instructions from the pre-classical period and presented them in "a series of one hundred and ninety-six short statements (Sutras) concerning yogic techniques and states" (Mallinson & Singleton, 2017, p. xvi-xvii). This compilation is known as Patanjali Yoga Sutras (PYS) and is the most preferred text in North America, used by almost all yoga training schools and accepted by yoga teachers as the theoretical foundation of yoga practice.

The post-classical period (800 AD to 1700 AD) brought three yoga philosophies that became the foundation of modern yoga teachings and practice (Bhavanani, 2011). The yoga philosophies in this period promoted practices that were based on the five bodily senses, and a book called Hatha Yoga Pradipika published in this period, advocated only thirty-two specific postures as practical and effective postures (Mallinson & Singleton, 2017).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup>Patanjali was a sage who carefully coordinated yogic thoughts and practices from previous scriptures and compiled into one book called Patanjali Yoga Sutras. Sutras are aphorisms and the compilation has 200 short sutras or aphorisms. The Yoga-sutras of Patanjali are the classic formulation of the science of meditation. See the translation and commentary on Patanjali Yoga Sutra by Satchidnananda 2012.

Hatha Yoga Pradipika is another influential text used in current yoga-teacher training institutions and yoga practices worldwide to understand and learn physical postures, their meanings, and their benefits.

The timeline enters the Modern period of Yoga from 1750 AD. Until Swami Vivekananda's speech on and demonstration of yoga postures at the Parliament of World Religion Conference in 1893, the yoga philosophies remained contained in the Indian Subcontinent (Braybooke, 2012). After Swami Vivekananda, many Indian Yoga masters visited North America, giving lectures and workshops on yoga, but, according to Chatterjee (2015), an Indian lady yoga practitioner named Indra Devi is recorded to have opened the first yoga studio in West Hollywood in 1947. Since then, the yoga teacher and yoga studios have grown exponentially in North America. As of June 2020, Yoga Alliance, "the largest nonprofit association based in the US representing the yoga community," reports on its website having over 7,000 registered yoga schools (RYS) and more than 100,000 registered yoga teachers (RYT) worldwide (Yoga Alliance, n.d., para.1).

#### Current trend of yoga practices

The traditional goal of yoga practice is spiritual harmony, spiritual awakening, and enlightenment (Satchidananda, 2012). The Patanjali Yoga Sutra, the most popular yoga text used in North American yoga teaching schools and centres, argues that "yoga is the science of the mind," and various methods and techniques are used to "restrain the modification of the mind," through which "Samadhi" the final spiritual attainment is realized (Satchidananda, 2012). Unlike the traditional way, nowadays, yoga is not usually learned at the feet of a guru but at exercise centres and gyms (Demeter, 2006). The gyms, yoga studios, and fitness centres frequently combine yoga classes, Pilates, and aerobic exercises. Mass (n.d.) states that modern āsana-oriented yoga blended European bodybuilding and gymnastic movements with Indian nationalism and, political Hinduism, and obscure indigenous yoga traditions. Even more, just googling "yoga classes near me" can generate various types of yoga classes, such as silent disco yoga, beer yoga, goat yoga, and necked yoga, which are modified, adapted and promoted to suit local popular cultures. In the context of the commercialization of yoga, Wellness Creative Co. (2021), a fitness market research company, has this statement on its webpage: "Yoga Growth, Markets and Trends:

The yoga industry is worth over \$117.2 billion worldwide and expected to grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 9.4%! And that's just studios, once you account for retreats, clothing, mats, blocks, and other accessories, the global yoga market is worth well over \$338 billion.

The popularity and commodification of yoga knowledge, philosophies, and practices in North America led many yoga types and styles to emerge. However, this review could not locate any peer-reviewed articles that compared and examined different methods and styles of yoga that are popular today in North America. Thus, a Google search was conducted using three different phrases to explore various methods and styles of yoga practiced today, especially in North America. The key search phrases included: "popular types of yoga practiced today," "popular styles of yoga practiced today," and "variety of popular yoga types." After carefully examining various yoga blogs, news and magazine articles, and other reports, ten popular yoga types in North America today were identified. In Table 1, we list the identified yoga types in the sequence of the year they were introduced in North America, yoga styles/programs, founders' names, and yoga practice methods. The yoga practice method is listed based on the year of its inception (column 2) to observe a chronological order of when yoga practice started to grow in North America.

Year	Yoga Styles/Programs	Founder's Name	Yoga Practice Method
	• •		
1906	Tantra Yoga	Pierre Bernard founded	Mindfulness/meditation
	Post-classical yoga	a Tantric Order of	Breathing
	philosophy that	America in San	Self-awareness through the
	focuses on mind-body	Francisco in 1906	five senses
	experiences		Postures: Slow posture
			movements are practiced but
			not important
1960	Kripalu Yoga	Amrit Desai	Breathing
		Kripalu yoga is named	Postures: Relaxation pose such
		after Ms. Desai's guru	as corpse pose (Shavasana)
		Master Sri	
		Kripalvananda	
1968	Kundalini Yoga	A Sikh named	Breathing
	Kundalini is revered	Harbhajan Singh	Focus is on inhalation and
	as the most sacred and secret practice of the	Khalsa brought Kundalini Yoga to the	exhalation of breathing Mindfulness/meditations: On
	Vedic period	USA in 1968	the chakras or body energy
	veule period	0.571 m 1900	centres
			Chanting (Mantra Yoga)
1970	Iyengar Yoga	B.K.S. Iyengar	Posture: The focus is on the
			posture structure alignment of
			the physical body through the
			practice of asanas or poses.
			Use of props are encouraged in
			Iyengar Yoga
1970	Restorative Yoga	Judith Lasater	Postures: Holding of postures
		Judith built the	for an extended period (3 to 10
		Restorative yoga upon	min)
		the teachings of	Breathing: Long and deep breathing is encouraged
		B.K.S. Iyenger's Iyenger Yoga	Props like pillows and blankets
		Tyenger Toga	are used for support
1973	Bikram Hot Yoga	Bikram Choudhury	Postures (Physical)
			Practiced in heat between 80 to
			100 degrees Fahrenheit for 90
			minutes
1975	Power Yoga, also	Beryl Bender Birch	Postures: Movements are
	known as Power	Beryl Birch was a	faster, like in an aerobic
	Vinyasa Yoga Power	student of Ashtanga	workout, Loud contemporary
	flow yoga Power hot	Yoga under K. Pattabhi	music, Hot environment—up
		Josi. Power yoga is	to 90 degrees Fahrenheit

	yoga Baptiste power yoga	considered the spin-off of Ashtanga yoga and Vinyasa yoga	Lots of movements
1975	Vinyasa Yoga	Sequences created by Krishnamacharya but popularized by K. Pattabhi Josi in the west	Postures (Physical): the focus is on transitioning from one posture to another, creating repetitious linking movements (physical) and breathing with complete mindfulness
1984	Ashtanga Yoga	K. Pattabhi Josi	Posture (physical) Breathing (Pranayama) Looking place (Drishti)
1984	Jivanmukti Yoga	David Life and Sharon Gannon	Postures: The focus is on the flow of the postures Mindfulness (Dhayna): The focus is on being mindful of the flow of the postures. Music (Nada): Use of music during practice to accentuate the focus on the practice

Table 1. popular yoga methods in the North America

Out of ten types of yoga methods, nine use physical postures as their primary method of practice. Similarly, breathing or pranayama practices stand second with six counts and mindfulness practices with four counts. Music counted three times, and chanting counted once. It seems that other non-physical forms of yoga, such as karma yoga or path of service and selfishness (Krishnan & Mulla, 2022), jnana yoga or the voga of contemplation and self-inquiry on the question "Who am I?" (Jijina & Biswas, 2022), mantra yoga or the act of repeatedly chanting a specific sound for a duration of time (Gerety, 2021), nada yoga or yoga of music and vibrations (Lakshmi, 2022), lava yoga or the path of meditation on energy centers identified within the body (McMahon et al., 2021), bhakti yoga or the path of devotion (Leu, 2020), and kriva yoga or the path of action and awareness (Chaturvedi et al., 2021) are almost non-existent in popular culture. It could be because these non-physical yoga practices can be incorporated as lifestyle practices, philosophical and spiritual endeavours, along with postures, breath, and mindfulness practices. Understanding the yoga types and methods is important to social work education and practice. Wang et al. (2020) examined the effects of different techniques of mindfulness and breathing practices and concluded that yogic practices are innately compatible with the social work profession.

#### Yoga in social work education

Yoga is a comprehensive system of mind-body-breath techniques that synchronizes body movements or postures with the breath, thoughts (mind), and emotions. Among the many definitions of the word, yoga can mean both the "union" and "to yoke," suggesting the interconnection of body, mind, and spirit (Grossman, 2019, p. 16). Although yoga originated from the East and social work discipline from the West, "many social work values and virtues resonate closely with yoga therapy's ethical and moral code of conduct" (Larocque & Moreau, 2020). Out of the eight limbs of yoga, the first two limbs, Yamas, which means restraints or moral disciplines, and Nivamas, which means observances, are the ethical rules that guide the right way of living in yogic philosophy. Yama focuses outward by not harming others and "consists of non-violence, truthfulness, non-stealing, continence and nongreed" (Satchidnananda, 2012, p. 125). Niyamas' focus is inward and consists of "purity, contentment, accepting, a study of spiritual books and self-surrender" (Satchidnananda, 2012, p. 127). Larocque and Moreau (2020) argued that these yogic values are congruent with the overarching principles that guide social work, which include "respect for the inherent worth and dignity of human beings, doing no harm, respect for diversity, and upholding human rights and social justice" (p. 104).

Equitable distribution of resources, one of the social justice principles in social work, can be addressed by using yoga to support marginalized communities in their healing journey. Yoga therapy has consistently proven to be effective in healing various mental, physical and emotional ailments (Ye et al., 2020;

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup>The first limb out of eight limbs of Patanjali Yoga. Yamas are the rules of personal life and consist of nonviolence, truthfulness, non-stealing, continence, and non-greed. See Satchidnananda, 2012, The Yoga Sutra of Patanjali, p.125-135.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup>The second limb out to eight limbs of Patanjali Yoga. Niyamas are the observance to stabilize mind and body and consist of purity, contentment, acceptance but not causing pain, study of spiritual books, and selfsurrender to God. See Satchidnananda, 2012, The Yoga Sutra of Patanjali, p. 126-136

Kuppili et al., 2018; Sathyanarayanan et al., 2019; Agarwal & Maroko-Afek, 2018; Cramer et al., 2019; Dunne et al., 2019; Srihari Sharma et al., 2019; Pearson et al., 2020; van Aalst et al., 2020). To engage in yoga practice, we only need body, breath and mind, the most accessible resources we have in our disposal, to embark on the healing journey. The only commitment one needs is to pay attention to what one already has--the body, the sensations, feelings, emotions, thoughts, and awareness of breathing (inhalation, exhalation, and maybe retention).

As we practice yoga relying on using the body as a source of our truths and knowledge, the awareness that the body has been the cause of much social oppression could foster self-acceptance (Caldwell & Leighton, 2018; Karcher & Caldwell, 2014; Mensinga, 2011; Shefer, 1990; Wurm, 2018). Perhaps this is why, in more recent years, "yoga's capacity to help foster internal states of safety, personal agency, and a capacity for self-awareness and selfregulation" has been harnessed to develop practices for those who have experienced trauma" (Mensinga, 2011, p. 650). Perhaps this is why so many disciplines, whether it is philosophy, counselling, neurobiology, psychotherapy, biology, and religion, are actively researching and studying the efficacy of yoga. Moreover, the more profound philosophical teaching of yoga is that we are not separate from one another. After all, the meaning of yoga is union--the union of mind, body, and breath, or the union of your small self to the higher self (Grossman, 2019).

Wang et al. (2020) argued for the need to integrate mindfulness practices within social work education to provide a well-rounded educational experience while giving students, faculty, and institutions multiple ways of thinking and problem-solving. Hick and Furlotte (2009) contends that social work may be the best location from which to "examine the relationship between yoga practices and social change, precisely because social work values dialectical approach to the inner and outer world" (p. 6). In the subsequent sections, we elaborate on the importance of yoga for social workers for their personal and professional practices, specifically focusing on four distinct areas: occupational stress management, coping strategy, self-care practice, and reflexivity.

#### **Occupational stress management**

Social workers constantly engage and interact with highly vulnerable, high need, traumatized, and sometimes unpredictable populations in the workplace (Guest, 2021). It is well documented that, as helping professionals, social workers experience frequent emotional burnout (Novak & Mazur, 2021) and are at high risk of being affected by the negative aspects of caring and helping professions, such as compassion fatigue and distress (Drake et al., 2022). In a recent study, Smith and Hanna (2021) found significant vicarious traumatization among front-line social workers who worked with traumatized clients for a prolonged period. This occupational distress is not limited to social work professionals but can start while pursuing social work education. Benner and Curl (2018) present cases of social work students who are also employed in the field developing burnout before advancing their careers. Benner and Curl's (2018) assertion is supported by Lewis and King (2019), who contend that social work practicum students are exposed to a broad range of intense emotional experiences as they assist clients in need, making them vulnerable to developing burnout early on. Gregory (2015) and Cheung and Leung (2020) found that yoga helped them personally and professionally. For Chueng and Leung, personal yoga practices supported them in managing occupation-related stress while working with demanding clients. Yoga practice strengthened their self-care routine and increased their mental, physical, and spiritual resilience. Thus, incorporating and "integrating self-care skills, techniques and strategies into daily social work practice becomes essential to prevent compassion fatigue, burnout, and vicarious trauma" (Lewis & King, 2019, p. 96). A study conducted by Rivera-Kloeppel and Mendenhall (2021) found a strong correlation between self-care and an ability to manage compassion fatigue among social workers and other helping professionals.

Various methods of yoga have been effectively used to manage stress experienced by front-line social workers (Jasti et al., 2020; Brown & Gerbarg, 2005), manage social worker's overall burnout at work (Peinado & Anderson, 2020; Cocchiara et al., 2019), and to manage stress in college students (Tripathi et al., 2018). Therefore, social workers could incorporate yoga as a self-care tool in their personal and professional practice and social work education to cope with burnout, vicarious trauma, and compassion fatigue.

## **Coping strategy**

The American Psychological Association (2014) defines a coping strategy as an "action, or a series of actions, or a thought process used in meeting a stressful or unpleasant situation or in modifying one's reaction to such a situation" (para.1). There are various models and conceptualizations of coping strategies. For example, Weiten and Lovd (2008) identified four types of coping strategies: appraisal-focused (adaptive cognitive), problem-focused (adaptive behavioural), emotion-focused, and occupation-focused coping. Various yoga methods can address physical, emotional, and psychological stress, and thus, yoga can be utilized as a coping strategy identified by Weiten and Lloyd (2008). Crowe et al. (2016) presented yoga as a coping tool, arguing how "yoga facilitates relaxation and connection of mind, body, and spirit through the use of breathing, meditation, and physical postures leading to decreased stress" (p.123). In another qualitative study, social workers serving refugees and homeless individuals reported engaging in regular yoga practice as a coping strategy to meet their job's mental, physical and emotional demands (Mette et al., 2020). The coping strategy included multiple yoga methods such as mindfulness, breathing, and postures identified in Table 1.

## Self-care

Self-care is another critical concept that arises when exploring why social workers incorporate yoga practices for their well-being and to support clients in a professional setting. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2021) defined self-care as the "ability of individuals, families and communities to promote their health, prevent disease, and maintain health" (para. 2). At first, self-care and coping strategies might sound similar, but it is essential not to confuse and mix these two concepts. Self-care can be deliberate, and individuals can play an active role in personal wellness and as a protective factor against stress, whereas coping strategies could be a conscious or unconscious response to stressful situations in life. Ford (2018) interviewed ten marriage and family therapists who actively practiced yoga as a primary form of self-care. Ford found that regular yoga practice acted as a protective factor against stress-related conditions such as compassion fatigue and burnout, which are common in the helping profession. In another study by Decker et al. (2019), MSW students were taught mindfulness and breathing techniques in a group classroom setting. Students were encouraged to apply those techniques in their field placement with clients. The study reports that, while teaching clients mindfulness-specific interventions, students discovered the practice also helped regulate their autonomic nervous systems, promoting selfcare skills for MSW students. Hence, practicing mindfulness and breathing along with yoga postures could promote self-care, supporting social workers in managing stress and achieving overall wellness.

## Reflexivity

The Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.) defines reflexivity as individuals' ability "to examine their feelings, reactions, and motives (= reasons for acting) and how they influence what they do or think in a situation" (para. 1). In the context of social work practice, D'Cruz et al. (2007) offer three variations on reflexivity; the first variation views reflexivity as a skill or a tool used to make sense of situations and one's world; the second variation focuses on social workers ability to analyse one's thought process critically while constructing knowledge about clients, and the third variation is concerned about how emotions and cognition is implicated in social work practice.

Reflexivity is a cornerstone of social work education and pedagogy (Watts, 2019). Social work educators are concerned about how to "equip social work students with the ability to self-reflect because this is a core professional competence" (Leung et al., 2011, p. 54). Yoga's mindfulness method of paying attention to our thought process, or being aware of one's breathing and bodily senses, could aid in building a solid foundation of reflexivity in social work students and professionals. For example, Deibert et al. (2021) shared his experience with his master's thesis project on reflexivity and how he used regular yoga practice to understand his views and their power to shape his experiences, developing a deeper level of critical reflection. Therefore, in 2019, Grossman developed and presented a graduate-level social work course where "the curriculum is grounded in the biopsychosocial approach, utilizing yoga as a way for social workers to focus on the well-being" of themselves and their clients (p. v). The significance of Grossman's work is that it could be used as a prototype for incorporating yoga courses in Social Work departments across higher education. Overall, Deibert et al.'s (2021) work "demonstrates the experience of connection between yoga, self-exploration, self-discovery and reflexivity" (p. 1401).

#### **Recommendations and conclusions**

The chapter recommends that the social work education field should develop a curriculum framework to incorporate various yoga methods in social work pedagogy. The social work profession has always considered an interdisciplinary biopsychosocial approach to understanding human needs and suffering (Briere & Scott, 2014; Heinonen & Spearman, 2015). Despite "being grounded in this theoretical approach, social work education and practice alike seem to ignore the experience of the body concerning the biological and sociological experience" (Mensinga, 2011, p. 660). Spence (2021) contends that the "time has come for bringing the wisdom of the body and the reflectiveness of social workers and their clients into their work and social work education" (p. 235).

Wang et al. (2020) also argue for the need to integrate mindfulness practices in social work education and suggest incorporating mindfulness practices in classrooms, such as dedicating a few moments to silence before starting a class, teaching students to emphatically and intentionally acknowledge the present moment and accepting experiences without judgement, including techniques of sensory awareness. As discussed above, social workers are bringing their direct experience from personal practice to professional care. Then, exploring trauma-sensitive yoga might be essential for social workers. The five tenets of trauma-sensitive yoga taught in Yoga Outreach's training program support yoga instructors in creating an optimal condition for trauma survivors and minimizing harm to clients (Yoga Outreach Society, 2019, p. 36-50). Thus, trauma-informed or trauma-sensitive yoga practice is another area social work practitioners and educators could explore in future. Hence, the recommendation is that the social work professional practice and pedagogy should actively incorporate complementary therapeutic approaches like yoga in the social work field. The skillset will not only support students in their academic journey but will continue to provide tools for self-care and coping strategies once they start their career and also bring the skills set to support clients.

Yoga, as a complementary therapeutic intervention, is gaining popularity among marginalized populations such as in transition houses, recovery houses, prison systems, and inpatient psychiatric wards, to mention a few (Barranger et al., 2020; Clark et al., 2014). Thus, social work education must incorporate yoga in its pedagogy to better equip students for their personal and professional lives. As Mensinga (2011) suggests "embodied practices such as yoga should be incorporated into academic courses to facilitate self-reflective processes to prepare social work students better to take care of themselves and improve outcomes for their clients" (p. 650). Mensinga (2011) also advocated for considering the body and embodied practices in social work education because as "social work education focuses on developing the cognitive and discursive aspect of self-awareness and reflection, recent neuroscientific studies have confirmed what has long been known in eastern embodied practices, that the body is the main channel for influencing the mind" (p. 650). Therefore, incorporating yoga methods for self-care, providing support for clients, and incorporating yoga in social work pedagogy may assist social workers in simultaneously addressing individual, community, and social justice issues associated with health and overall well-being.

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