



Perception and Practices of Yoga Among Old Age Home Inhabitants-A Focus Group Discussion



Purva Shoor ^a, Ajay Agarwal ^b, Dharmendra K. Gupta ^c, Mohammad Intekhab Alam Chand ^d

Manuscript submitted: 09 April 2026, Manuscript revised: 18 May 2026, Accepted for publication: 27 June 2026

Corresponding Author ^a



Keywords

Disadvantaged elderly;
Geriatric health;
Old-age home;
Old-age;
Yoga;

Abstract

INTRODUCTION: Yoga integrates physical postures, breath regulation, and mindfulness, serving as an intervention that is safe, adaptable, scalable, and modifiable to the mobility levels of the elderly. **OBJECTIVES:** To find out the socio-demographic profile, discuss practice, feasibility, difficulties faced, and explore the perceived benefits of Yoga on mental, physical, social, and spiritual determinants of health. **MATERIAL AND METHODS:** A focus group discussion explored the viewpoints of 13 male and 11 female volunteers above 60 years of age residing in a modest old-age home. Two 25-minute sessions were conducted separately for males and females. Video recording was done for both sessions. **RESULTS:** Participants belonged to lower middle-income rural families; all were Hindus but illiterate and used to engage in manual labor at a young age. Most of the elderly were residents of the old-age home for 2-5 years. They practiced yoga daily but were not very perceptive about its experience. **CONCLUSION:** Yoga was viewed as a positive addition to the daily activities at the old-age home.

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^a Professor, Community Medicine, PGDEOH, India

^b Professor, Community Medicine, India

^c Professor, Community Medicine, India

^d Professor, Community Medicine, India

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1 Introduction

Functional ability that enables well-being in older age. WHO's Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021–2030) outlines four key action areas: changing attitudes toward ageing, creating age-friendly environments, delivering integrated and person-centered care, and ensuring access to long-term care¹. This perspective examines yoga, a holistic mind–body practice integrating physical postures, breath regulation, and mindfulness, as a potentially safe, adaptable, and scalable intervention for older adults.

Research suggests that yoga may be a safe, adaptable, and feasible intervention for older adults, with studies reporting high acceptability in both community and clinical settings¹. Its practice is modifiable according to mobility levels and specific chronic diseases through chair-based and prop-supported practices. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidelines also include yoga, among recommended options for managing low back pain and sciatica, which are common ailments of older people (Raijmann et al., 2025). To improve the quality of sleep, physical health, reduce falls, improve gait and cognition, and combat loneliness, yoga is a safe and solid method of enhancing the lifestyle of old people who live isolated in old-age homes, or secluded in families, or are struggling with some chronic ailments. A good quality of life is their right, and so we can determine their viewpoints on the adoption of yoga and the feasibility of practice in the context of an old age home.

Objectives

The research sought to find out the sociodemographic profile of the old volunteers residing at an old age home and describe the practice, feasibility, and difficulties faced there to perform yoga. It also explored the perceived benefits of Yoga practice among the elderly inhabitants on mental, physical, social, and spiritual determinants of health.

2 Materials and Methods

- 1) Study Design: A qualitative focus group discussion; observational study
- 2) Study population: Elderly population above 60 years of age at an old age home located in the rural area of northern Uttar Pradesh, India
- 3) Sampling method: Purposive sampling, volunteer elderly males and females were included.
- 4) Sample size: There were 90 inhabitants of the old age home as per the 23rd Feb 2026 listing. Out of these, 13 male and 11 female volunteers were collected for 1 session, with each group conducted separately for men and women. Only 7 male participants continued the discussion till the end, as the rest retreated gradually after 15 minutes of discussion.
- 5) Inclusion criteria: All elderly males and females who gave consent to participate in this study on 29th June 2026, Monday, from 11.30 am to 12.40 pm.
- 6) Exclusion criteria: Those elderly who do not give consent to participate.
- 7) Time period: 25 minutes for each session were allocated, where 5 minutes were taken to note the participants' names, native place, age, and length of stay at the old age home.
- 8) Method of data collection and analysis:
 - a) Enrolment of participants in study- Elderly were divided into groups of 13 male and 11 female volunteers of an old age home. Baseline information was obtained before beginning the discussion from both participants and the representative caretaker. A facilitator covered pre-

- prepared questions, which were translated into Hindi for conducting a focus-group discussion according to the objectives of the study.
- b) An informed consent was received from the authorities of the old age home, and as the old were not literate, verbal permission to interview them was taken from each participant after explaining to them the purpose of the group discussion and ensuring them that their personal information would not be disclosed.
 - c) There were 23 main questions asked, and discussions were kept short politely as the participants were agile and had to be brought back to the theme of the study due to the propensity of the elderly to talk at length about their personal grief.
 - d) A videorecording of the discussion was studied by the efforts of the community medicine department researchers. The recording was initiated through a smartphone utilized by the caretaker of the old age home.
- 9) Data analysis: A detailed account of the perception and practices of Yoga was compiled after detailed scrutiny of the videos. STROBE guidelines were followed to prepare the manuscript.
 - 10) Budget: The researchers requested a transport facility to travel to the old age home and back.
 - 11) Ethical Clearance: The research is registered as VAMCRH/REC/CM/001/MAR2026 at the medical college located at Shahjahanpur.
 - 12) Referencing generative AI: We acknowledge the use of Gemini, the free version of Gemini, to include some success stories from India as examples of phenomenal changes in the health and development of illiterate and poor elderly through yogic practices in the discussion part of this research report.

3 Results and Discussions

3.1 Results

Socio-demographic profile of the elderly

All participants dwelling in the old-age home belonged to lower-middle-income rural families of the district Shahjahanpur in the state of Uttar Pradesh in Northern India. They were all Hindu by religion, and the old-age home was dependent upon the government funds and private grants provided to them for caretaking. 14 helpers were working under government salaries to take care of the elderly. This information was provided by the manager of the old-age home located in the village of Bartara in the district of Shahjahanpur.

The elderly volunteers were not literate and used to engage in some kind of manual labor, predominantly farming.

There were clean bathing and toilet facilities available at the old-age home, and a provision of safe and hygienic meals three times a day and snacks twice a day. They were provided with single wooden beds in dorms that were separate for males and females. There was no temperature control inside the dorms. A fan was provided during the summer. There was a television available for the elderly males but not for females (Mooventhan & Nivethitha, 2017).

The age, gender, and length of stay of volunteering participants in the focus-group discussion are tabulated in Table 1. There were 24 participants, 11 females and 13 males, who discussed yoga practices. Out of the 11 females, a 75-plus (age-unknown) woman, who could not speak the Hindi language nor understand what was said, was brought 2 months ago, as well as a 65-year-old was brought to the home 1 month ago by the local police.

None of the elderly reported any non-communicable disease except one male who had breathing difficulty. Some males and females mentioned mild aches and pains in joints and minor mobility issues.

Table 1
Age, gender, and length of stay of old volunteers

Parameters	Frequency	Percentage
Age-group of Females (n=11)		
60-70 years	03	27.27

Parameters	Frequency	Percentage
70-80 years	05	45.45
Above 80 years	03	27.27
Length of stay at old-age home; Females (n=11)		
Less than a year	03	27.27
1-2 years	02	18.18
2-5 years	01	09.09
More than 5 years	05	45.45
Age-group of Males (n=13)		
60-70 years	08	61.54
70-80 years	03	23.08
Above 80 years	02	15.38
Length of stay at old-age home; Males (n=13)		
Less than a year	03	23.08
1-2 years	04	30.77
2-5 years	03	23.08
More than 5 years	03	23.08

Feasibility of practicing yoga and its perceived benefits among the elderly inhabitants of old-age homes

Tables 2 and 3 describe the concerns of the participants regarding the practice of yoga at the old-age home and its perceived benefits, respectively. The questions were posed to each participant, but they were not very expressive individually, more so in the case of females. The session with elderly females was loud and noisy in between, when one of them started to answer with full enthusiasm upon being prompted multiple times. Most replied with a nod of their head or spoke similarly to others. There were modest yes or no or I agree with reframing of questions, supported with examples. For example, when the elderly females could not rate from 1 to 5 their affinity towards yoga, the questions were reframed like, do you miss yoga when it is skipped on a particular day, or do you enthusiastically look forward to a yoga session as a favorite engagement, or prefer lying down on your cot? Therefore, to dig further, supplementary and indirect questions were asked, but their responses were found to be brief.

The male elderly participants were more verbal, and the 7 of them who remained till the end of the session were enthusiastic about yoga, and one elderly person demonstrated what they do every morning. Like the women, their responses were brief, and another elderly; Ram Chandra, discussed his respiratory trouble due to work that he used to do, but he was not clear what caused it. He mentioned that he got better with exercise, and he also recommended that physical activity would keep them all moving and age well. He was a relatively new entrant to the old-age home, registered there 5 months ago.

Table 2
Yoga practice feasibility and related concerns of the old-age home inhabitants

Discussion themes for <i>females</i>	Extracted points
<i>Felt the need to exercise daily</i>	<i>All of them looked forward to yoga. They wanted to stretch and increase their muscle strength; no one voted for better digestion.</i>
<i>What time is delegated for exercising?</i>	<i>Morning time for about 1.5 hours. Usually, they begin by 7 am with a trainer.</i>
<i>How often did they want to exercise during the day?</i>	<i>Only in the morning time, don't want to repeat sessions in the evening and neither in parts.</i>
<i>Preference for Yoga over other forms of exercise</i>	<i>No answer</i>
<i>Do you need a yoga instructor?</i>	<i>Yes, and they were already practicing with a trainer.</i>
<i>What kind of yoga exercises do</i>	<i>They lacked nomenclature but demonstrated a few Hatha Yoga poses</i>

Shoor, P., Agarwal, A., Gupta, D. K., & Alam Chand, M. I. (2026). Perception and practices of yoga among old age home inhabitants-A focus group discussion. *International Journal of Health Sciences*, 10(2), 174–183.
<https://doi.org/10.53730/ijhs.v10n2.15974>

you prefer?	<i>and preferred “anulom vilom” pranayama, which is a breathing exercise. They liked all exercises during the session imposed by the instructor/trainer; some cannot sit and get up so they do “anulom vilom” during those poses that others would be performing.</i>
For how long you have been practicing yoga exercises?	<i>After entry into the old-age home</i>
How comfortable is it to perform yoga at the old age home?	<i>They found it comfortable, although no props were available, neither yoga pants, probably they practiced simple exercises.</i>
Would you like to listen to talks by gurus and other instructors or religious heads about yoga practices?	<i>None of them could read and write. They weren't keen on any spiritual talk except from the guru of the old-age home. They were satisfied that they were getting adequate whole meals which they were deprived of earlier when they were in their family.</i>
Discussion themes for males	Extracted points
Felt need to exercise daily	<i>The elderly looked forward to daily yoga sessions. They preferred stretching and some mentioned that it improved their digestion. They wanted to be strong and therefore liked to work out for some time.</i>
What time is delegated for exercising?	<i>They preferred morning hours.</i>
How often did they want to exercise during the day?	<i>They delegated half an hour in the morning with an instructor/trainer. One of them wanted to repeat sessions in the evening but the others retaliated, and so he also concluded that once a day in the morning was enough for their well-being.</i>
Preference of Yoga over other forms of exercise	<i>They were unresponsive to this question as they never tried anything else among the volunteers; they did not even think of brisk walking as an exercise.</i>
Do you need a yoga instructor?	<i>A caretaker helps them as an instructor.</i>
What kind of yoga exercises do you prefer?	<i>They prefer “anulom vilom” pranayama and all poses for short time-periods, one elderly person demonstrated all exercises that open the limbs and enhance mobility.</i>
For how long you have been practicing yoga exercises?	<i>They started practicing yoga only after they were admitted to the old-age home.</i>
How comfortable is it to perform yoga at the old age home?	<i>They just replied that they performed yoga out in the open and couldn't understand how to seek comfort.</i>
Would you like to listen to talks by gurus and other instructors or religious heads about yoga practices?	<i>All the elderly were illiterate, so they denied reading books on yoga but were willing to attend religious and spiritual discourses on yoga in the hall of the home or watch health shows on television.</i>

Table 3
Perceived benefits of yoga practices among old-age home inhabitants

Discussion themes for <i>females</i>	Extracted points
What benefits of yoga practice have you experienced?	<i>Became strong</i>
Do you feel it is an essential part of your daily lifestyle?	<i>All participants looked forward to it</i>
Tell some stories about the perceived benefits of yoga	<i>A woman discussed that some young females of her village used to practice yoga, and there was a huge propaganda campaign about it.</i>
Your perception for longevity/T2DM/HTN/weight loss/mental health/spiritual health/lifestyle/others	<i>All women described themselves without any non-communicable disease, undetected to date. Some were taking pills when unwell; they reported that stretching was beneficial for mobility and relaxation. One elderly woman argued, “We want to gain weight and eat more.</i>

	<i>According to me, the more we eat and become fleshy, it will make us healthier."</i>
Has it positively affected your loneliness trouble?	<i>There is a community for yoga, but most are quarrelsome and stay alone and engage in trivial fights every day, as reported by the caretaker.</i>
Has it reduced stressful thinking?	<i>The women did not understand what stress is, so there was no response to the question, along with confused expressions.</i>
Does yoga improve the quality of your thoughts?	<i>All were quiet, and there were no comments on this either.</i>
Does yoga improve your daily activities and confidence?	<i>The reply was affirmative but not enthusiastic, nor very keen, which corresponded to all volunteers.</i>
Rate from 1-5 how much of a yoga fan you are? Or how much yoga and its practice arouses enthusiasm in you?	<i>They all liked to do yoga in the morning hours, but they couldn't express the degree of their affinity for the practice. Probably some deep counseling sessions are required, as the women were hostile and alone.</i>
Can someone among you teach yoga to your counterparts?	<i>They were playful at this question and started pointing at Phoolwati ji, who was the most active participant, and who also denied the ability to demonstrate the yoga practices every day to all female inhabitants. Overall, the females gave short replies and explained with gestures, only indicating that yoga was something they did not fully adopt and were unable to express or feel positive changes due to yoga.</i>
Discussion themes for males	Extracted points
What benefits of yoga practice have you experienced?	<i>Most perceived yoga as a means to remain mobile and soothe their aching muscles. One participant mentioned that he feels stronger, and another had betterment of respiration.</i>
Do you feel it is an essential part of your daily lifestyle?	<i>They all agreed to it after being prompted twice or thrice.</i>
Tell some stories about the perceived benefits of yoga	<i>All were quiet, and then a few of the participants preferred to leave the room where the group discussion was being carried out.</i>
Your perception of longevity/T2DM/HTN/weight loss/mental health/spiritual health/lifestyle/others	<i>The participants said that sugar becomes normal, blood pressure gets balanced, but they don't know if they have these ailments. All affirmed that it should be included in the daily activity at least once for muscle strength.</i>
Has it positively affected your loneliness trouble?	<i>Most of them remained oblivious to this question.</i>
Has it reduced stressful thinking?	<i>They all eagerly affirmed that it reduced their stress.</i>
Does yoga improve the quality of your thoughts?	<i>At this question, the elderly became restless and one of them approached the facilitator, demonstrated some poses and said, "I like doing them, and I can do all of them, I love anulom vilom pranayama, and that's it."</i>
Does yoga improve your daily activities and confidence?	<i>Those who stayed, seven of them, agreed on it.</i>
Rate from 1-5 how much of a yoga fan you are? Or how much yoga and its practice arouses enthusiasm in you?	<i>None of them could rate their affinity towards yoga but said that it is good practice which they would like to continue. The reply came after being prompted at least four to five times and ushering individuals especially to provide their opinion.</i>
Can someone among you teach yoga to your counterparts?	<i>None of the seven participants could agree on this.</i>

3.2 Discussions

The most important finding in this focus group discussion is that all the participants came from resource-poor households and were not literate. Therefore, the level of human development was a major constraint for them to understand whether they were comfortably performing yoga, and about the spiritual aspects of the practice.

They did not know about the right quality of thought and whether they were lonely. They accepted their fate in life when their families decided to abandon them, and the most sought activity for them was to have food and talk to their counterparts about vague themes and spend their old age listlessly. Because of illiteracy, they couldn't even read books. Practicing religion, indulging in chores, and discussing bitter experiences with each other engaged them majorly.

Their major requirement was food, and due to lean bodies, they were weak and reactive, and therefore, they all liked to practice pranayama in seated postures, which is very beneficial in improving respiration and providing mental tranquility. Though this concept hasn't been formally studied or analyzed among them.

Pandya² et al., in their study conducted in 2019, included older women with sarcopenia. Their yoga education program was applied and studied, showing improved gait speed, muscular strength, and functional performance, like our respondents.

Hariprasad et al (2013), found better sleep quality among older adults in their 2013 study through routine yogic practices. There was no comment about better sleep patterns attributed to physical activity among our study respondents.

Hamrick et al (2017), showed a 48% reduction in self-reported falls and improved balance with the practice of yoga in their research conducted in 2017 among rural older adults. Nguyen et al (2024), revealed that yoga practice among the age group of 60-70 years could improve self-perceived health. Our respondents were not very expressive but reported better muscle strength and functionality. The men mentioned better digestion, also.

The plight of the elderly reflects the development of society. Therefore, educating the elderly who are poor and illiterate, and residing in old-age homes, about different yogic practices like Hatha, Yin, Power Yoga, and Vinyasa with planned and deliberate professional help from voluntary organizations is very much required. Illiteracy is dogma, and it stings individuals at all ages. There needs to be some intervention to engage the elderly in educational activities like crafts, music, kirtan, or religious discourses, engaging them in cooking, peeling vegetables, cleaning their toilets themselves, and practicing different forms of yoga. Some of the success stories of yogic practices improving the plight of illiterate and poor elderly in India are discussed below:

- 1) The Rural Elders of Madhya Pradesh: A long-term qualitative study conducted in rural M.P. revealed significant improvements in joint flexibility and emotional well-being among the impoverished, sedentary senior people. Participants learned modified asanas by merely imitating instructors without the need for literacy, which reduced their dependency on family members for daily physical tasks.
- 2) Amrita SeRve (Amma's Villages): This program used yoga to close the gap between basic health and community self-reliance in distant, underprivileged villages spread across 21 Indian states. Elderly people who were illiterate found relief from back pain and chronic arthritis, enabling them to continue participating actively in village life.
- 3) Elder Self-Help Groups (ESHGs) in HelpAge India: NGOs host holistic health programs where illiterate rural women practice yoga, dance, meditation, and mindfulness in places like Assam and Maharashtra. Outside of their typical household responsibilities, participants reported reduced depression, improved sleep, and a renewed sense of self-worth.
- 4) Abhayam Retreats (Bharat Yogavidya Kendra): Based in locations such as Madanapalle, these specialist endeavours teach elders age-appropriate breathing techniques (pranayama) and healing exercises. The elderly who are economically disadvantaged can revive their physical and mental agility in a safe, communal setting thanks to these activities.

The value of yoga among the inhabitants of this old-age home cannot be extrapolated to the entire district because they only represent some deprived and resource-poor village households who cannot provide for

themselves. This study exclusively studies the responses of previously non-sensitized individuals towards yogic practices, which is a major limitation in generalizing research findings.

4 Conclusion

Even with limited expression and speech, there is one very important conclusion: yoga is being looked at as a positive addition in the elderly's daily lifestyle, which they look forward to and are already acknowledging that it brings about joint mobility and muscle strength. This research was carried out as a pioneering effort by the community medicine department of the medical college to find out the concerns of disadvantaged elderly while practicing yoga and their perceptions of its benefits. There is limited research on the subject among this section of society.

Conflict of interest

None

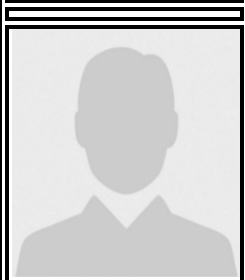
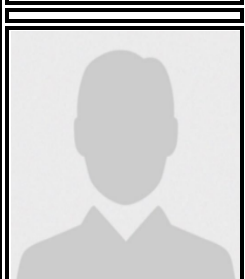
Acknowledgments

We are grateful to two anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments on the earlier version of this paper.

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Biography of Authors

	Dr Purva Shoor Affiliation: Professor Subject: Community Medicine, PGDEOH ORCID ID: 0000-0002-2707-0522 E-mail ID: drpurva786@gmail.com
	Dr Ajay Agarwal Affiliation: Professor Subject: Community Medicine E-mail ID: drajayagarwal0@gmail.com
	Dr Dharmendra K. Gupta Affiliation: Professor Subject: Community Medicine E-mail ID: dharmendrashivani25@gmail.com
	Dr Mohammad Intekhab Alam Chand Affiliation: Professor Subject: Community Medicine E-mail ID: chandcmu003@gmail.com