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Exploring the Lived Experiences of Kriya Yoga Standing Recharging Exercises among Kriya Yoga Practitioners: A Qualitative Phenomenological Study

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Abstract

The teachings of great sages, monks, gurus, and spiritual practitioners have influenced India's rich yogic and spiritual legacy since beginning. The ultimate goal of yoga, according to Maharishi Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, is to free oneself from suffering by calming the mind's oscillations (Chitta Vritti Nirodha). The ancient psycho-spiritual practice of Kriya Yoga aims to synchronise the body, mind, intellect and consciousness in order to accelerate human growth. Its intellectual underpinnings are found throughout the classical texts and are deeply ingrained in the yogic tradition. Mahavatar Babaji (also known as Shiva Baba) later systematised it while Paramahansa Yogananda (disciple of Sri Yukteshwar Giriji) more recently spread it throughout the world. Kriya yoga uses specific pranayama techniques, meditation, and moral behaviour to purify the nervous system, regulate life energy (Prana), and awaken higher realms of consciousness. Nowadays, Kriya Yoga has become well-known and is practiced all over the world through a variety of spiritual groups and traditions, each of which emphasises its core ideas of self-discipline, breath control, and meditation. The current study focuses on the teachings and practices of Shree Guru Yogi Satyam Ji, specifically the Kriya Yoga Standing Recharging Technique, among these various approaches. The aim of this study includes the lived experiences of Kriya yoga practitioners in the domains of physical experience, emotion, mental health, cognitive experience, social relationships, and overall personal experiences. The study employs an interpretative phenomenological approach and a qualitative research design. Ten participants were interviewed for the study in order to learn about their actual experiences with modifications pertaining to five areas following regular practice of kriya yoga. Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, the results indicated that Kriya Yoga Standing Recharging Exercises were significantly important to the practitioners who were interviewed. Perceived favourable experiences in the physical, emotional, cognitive, social, and professional domains were mirrored in their narratives.

Keywords: Kriya Yoga, Recharging exercises, Prana, Holistic health, Meditation

Introduction

In yogic traditions, Kriya Yoga is a methodical approach to breath control, meditation, and self-discipline has been praised for its transformational benefits on the body, mind, and spirit. Kriya Yoga is a scientific

and spiritual discipline that promotes mental clarity, increases productivity, and fosters a balanced lifestyle. It is based on the teachings of ancient Indian texts like the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, the Bhagavad Gita, and various Upanishads. In order to maximise human potential, this practice combines controlled breathing techniques (pranayama), meditation, and ethical discipline. It was made popular in the contemporary period by spiritual giants like Paramahansa Yogananda through "Autobiography of a Yogi". In Kriya Yoga, the word Kriya comes from the Sanskrit root "Kri", meaning action or process, while "Ya" is traditionally interpreted in some yogic explanations as referring to the divine principle or the soul. Therefore, Kriya Yoga is often interpreted as the yoga of conscious action or the path of disciplined spiritual practice, through which an individual walks towards higher states of consciousness.

Lord Krishna also describes the regulation of breath as a yogic practice in Bhagavad Gita (4.29), connecting breath regulation with discipline and self-control.

Historical Evolution and Tradition of Kriya Yoga

According to M. Govindan (1991), in his book Babaji and the Kriya Yoga Tradition of 18 Great Siddhas, Lord Shiva initiated Nagaraj Babaji into the practices of Kriya Kundalini Pranayama and Vaasi Yoga through the teachings of Siddhas, particularly Agastya Muni. Vaasi Yoga, rooted in the ancient Tamil Siddha tradition, is an advanced yogic practice that emphasises the regulation of subtle inner breath and the movement of vital energy through the body's subtle channels. Its primary objective is to harmonise the body, mind, and soul through breath regulation, internal purification, and spiritual development.

The book further describes Babaji's transmission of Kriya Kundalini Pranayama and Dhyana (meditation) to Adi Shankaracharya, as well as his initiation of Lahiri Mahasaya, Kabir, and Mataji Nagalakshmi, his sister, into Kriya Yoga. Babaji regarded Kriya Yoga as Sampoorna Yoga (integral or complete yoga), as it facilitates transformation across five dimensions of human existence: physical, vital (Pranic), mental, intellectual, and spiritual. These dimensions are associated with the five Koshas (sheaths) described in yogic philosophy. From this perspective, the body is not merely an instrument for physical well-being or personal gratification; rather, it is cultivated and maintained as a means of attaining higher consciousness and spiritual realisation (Govindan, 1991).

According to the spiritual lineage of Self-Realization Fellowship (SRF) and Yogoda Satsanga Society of India (YSS), Mahavatar Babaji brought Kriya Yoga back to life in the modern era by initiating Shyamacharan Lahiri Mahasaya into its practice in the Himalayas in 1861. These lessons were later passed down by Lahiri Mahasaya to his great disciple Swami Sri Yukteswar Giri, who subsequently instructed Paramahansa Yogananda. In order to spread Kriya Yoga throughout the world, Yogananda travelled to the US in 1920 and founded the Self-Realization Fellowship. His book published in 1946 named as "Autobiography of a Yogi" contributed to the global popularisation of this spiritual practice.

Rather than focusing only on an intellectual grasp of yoga philosophy, Lahiri Mahasaya promoted Kriya Yoga as a practical practice of inner spiritual development. He emphasised the value of meditation, breath control, self-control, and internal awareness while urging practitioners to incorporate regular Kriya practice into their daily life. He thought that householders may pursue spiritual enlightenment while carrying out their social and familial obligations; it was not just for renunciates. Consistent practice (sadhana), individual experience, and progressive spiritual development were all highly valued in his teachings (Yogananda, 1946; Chatterjee, 2004).

According to Swami Sri Yukteswar Giri, the opening verses (Yukteshwar 1920) introduce three essential spiritual disciplines: Brahmanidhana (surrendering or establishing oneself in Brahman), Svadhyaya (self-

study and spiritual reflection), and Tapas (austerity or disciplined effort). Together, these practices can be understood as a form of Yajna, representing a dedicated spiritual undertaking, selfless action, and a pathway towards self-realisation.

Tapas, in particular, should not be understood merely as severe physical austerities or bodily hardships. Rather, it emphasises the development of inner strength, endurance, and forbearance, expressed through the concept of Titiksha.

The term Matrasparsheshu refers to the contact between the senses and their respective objects, which gives rise to experiences such as heat and cold, pleasure and pain, and other contrasting sensations arising from interactions with the external world. The underlying teaching highlights the importance of maintaining inner stability and equanimity amidst these dualities. It encourages individuals to rise above attachment, aversion, and fluctuating emotional reactions, cultivating mental resilience, adaptability, and a balanced state of consciousness.

Svadhyaya, or self-study, involves genuinely listening (Shravana), contemplating (Manan), and meditating (Nididhyasana) on the lessons (Upadesh) of the actual essence of the Self (Atma-tattva). Here, Svadhyaya is explained as a three-part process that appeals to the teachings of the "Atma-tattva," which is the ultimate reality or the true nature of the Self.integrity and shame that result from our interactions with the outside world (Giri 2024). The verse highlights that real seriousness is found in developing the ability to be unbroken and unwavering inside these dichotomies, unaffected by likes or dislikes. It is about teaching relaxation and mental flexibility.

Swami Yogananda (1946) explained beautifully that "Kriya" is the same knowledge that Lord Krishna taught his favourite disciple and friend Arjuna a millennium ago. Sage Patanjali, Jesus Christ, Saint John, Saint Paul and all other disciples were already familiar with it. Man is propelled forward on his natural path by the earthly and celestial atmosphere in a sequence of 12-year cycles. Swami Yogananda (1946) clearly described in his book that a million years of normal, disease-free development are necessary for man to perfect his brain and reach cosmic realisation through healthy eating, sunlight, and harmonious contemplation. It will take a million years for men who are solely guided by nature and her divine design to achieve self-realization. A million solar returns are required to properly detoxify the cerebral high-rise for the manifestation of cosmic realisation; twelve years of normal, healthy life are required to produce even minor improvements in brain structure.

The six spinal centers which are cervical, dorsal, lumbar, sacrum, and coccygeal plexuses correspond to the twelve astral signs of the zodiac, the symbolic cosmic man, and the term "Kriya Yogi" mentally guides his energy to spiral upward and downward. A half-minute of kriya is equivalent to a year of natural spiritual unfolding; a half-minute of energy revolution around the sensitive spinal cord of man influences gradual progress in his evolution.(Yogananda 2022)

Conceptual Understanding of Kriya Yoga

The following elements of Kriya Yoga are explained by a spiritual practitioner Sri M(2010) in his book called Apprenticed to a Himalayan Master:A Yogi’s Autobiography

1. Meaning: Kriya refers to a technique, method, or practice.
2. Goal: To assist the practitioner in escaping the oscillations of an unstable mind.
3. Breath and Prana: Kriya entails balancing Prana and breathing in a rhythmic manner.
4. Consciousness: According to conventional wisdom, the practice involves guiding consciousness via the central channel (Sushumna).

5. Daily discipline: The emphasis is on regular practice, honesty, simplicity, and non-violence.

According to Harihārananda (1989), Kriya Yoga represents a scientific technique of soul-culture directed towards self-realisation. He explained that respiration plays an important role in regulating mental activity, suggesting that the conscious observation and regulation of breath can facilitate mental equilibrium and inward awareness. He further described Kriya Yoga as a means of accelerating spiritual evolution and transforming ordinary consciousness into higher states of spiritual awareness. In his later discourse, delivered on his 91st birthday and published in 2006, he emphasised that Kriya Yoga facilitates the integrated development of the body, mind, intellect and soul (Harihārananda, 2006).

Yogananda (1997) wrote a book named "Journey to Self-Realization-Realization" where he claimed that Kriya yoga is an energising practice that uses isometrics to infuse the entire person with divine life. You can access the cosmic base of energy by engaging in Kriya yoga meditation and practice. It is therefore a psychophysiological technique that accelerates spiritual development. It improves mental wellness, self-awareness, and mental purity. It is an energy-tilling technique that can revitalise your life and unite you with the ultimate. Through breathing and meditation that can connect to the power of cosmic foundations, Kriya yoga revitalises every cell in your body, allowing you to effortlessly and fortunately carry out your physical and mental tasks. guidance of awareness and the voice of creation to each molecule's divine life.(Yogananda 1997)

Kriya yoga is a great method for cleansing the mind. Since the mind is a function, or a type of dynamic prana, prana and mind are two sides of the same coin. Pranayama inevitably influences the mind when one performs Kriya pranayama, which in turn impacts prana. The mind will gradually become tranquil. The incessant barrage of ideas, feelings, and other thoughts will gradually subside, and for many individuals, this serenity will be a welcome diversion from the typical "monkey mind" state of mind. Even if practicing Kriya doesn't result in much serenity, that's still a good thing. Everyone needs a little peace and quiet to get by in this crazy world. It's already a wonderful thing, a step closer to a sane world, if that enhanced sense of calmness allows one to have better relationships with oneself, family, and other people! Kriya can therefore make everyone's life and mind more "user-friendly" in the context of outward contacts with the world. When it comes to interacting with the outside world, that is a straightforward and fundamental (but not exclusive) advantage of Kriya. Regular practice is essential to achieving that mental serenity. The daily practice of Kriya is its greatest secret. Everything else will happen on its own if Sadhak is disciplined enough to practise Kriya on a regular basis.

Kriya Yoga meditation as guided by Swami Shree Yogi Satyam who is a master of Kriya Yoga and Scientist. (Satyam 2022). Following the Paramhansa Yogananda teaching, Standing Recharging is an essential component of Kriya Yoga Meditation. It is not intended to be a conventional physical exercise but rather a specialised yogic technique that involves the conscious regulation and direction of life energy throughout the body. Its primary purpose is to revitalise the body, harmonise the mind, enhance inner awareness, and prepare the practitioner for deeper states of meditation and spiritual development. It takes about 20-25 minutes to complete. Kriya Yoga is considered as a powerful yoga that combines various techniques such as breath control, meditation and spiritual self discipline. Meditation can wipe away the stress, fear, anxiety and bring internal peace. Spreading even a few minutes in meditation can help to restore calmness and inner peace. The Kriya Yoga Energisation Exercises created by Swami Shree Yogi Satyam were investigated in the following study. The 42 Standing Recharging Exercises that make up the intervention focus on body awareness, regulated muscle tension and relaxation, systematic body energisation, and concentration. These exercises, which are performed for 20 to 25 minutes per day, are

intended to improve psychophysiological balance, vigour, and consciousness. The study emphasises the necessity of conducting both qualitative and empirical research on the physiological and psychological benefits of Kriya Yoga.

Kriya Yoga and Mental Health

Ojha et al. (2024) investigated the quantitative EEG correlates of Kriya Yoga practice among medical professionals. Their findings indicated that participants experienced positive subjective sensations, a reduction in perceived psychological tension, and relaxation-related changes in brain activity. Similarly, Srivastava (2021) explored the feasibility and therapeutic effectiveness of Kriya Yoga among individuals with depression. The study reported a considerable reduction in depressive symptoms following Kriya Yoga practice, suggesting its potential as a complementary approach to improving psychological well-being.

Thigale and Moharkar (2025) conducted a pilot study to examine the effectiveness of Standing Recharging Kriya Yoga in reducing anxiety and stress among physiotherapy students.The intervention was administered over a period of four weeks. This study appears to have followed Standing Recharging Kriya Yoga as guided by Swami Shree Yogi Satyam. Anxiety and stress were assessed using the Hamilton Anxiety Rating Scale (HAM-A) and Medical Student Stressor Questionnaire (MSSQ), respectively. The findings indicated statistically significant reductions in anxiety and stress scores following the intervention, suggesting the potential benefits of Standing Recharging Kriya Yoga for psychological well-being

Kumar (2025) investigated how Kriya Yoga affected modern living, productivity, and mental clarity. The study combined modern scientific research with traditional yogic literature, such as the Bhagavad Gita, Yoga Sutras, and Upanishads. It emphasised how pranayama, meditation, and a disciplined lifestyle may enhance focus and attention, cognitive performance, and emotional control. Stress reduction, better decision-making, increased productivity, and decreased burnout are all linked to Kriya Yoga. Additionally, the practice fosters spiritual development, mental stability, resilience, and physical well-being. The study highlights its potential as a comprehensive, economical strategy for corporate wellness initiatives, educational environments, and individual well-being.

Kriyambiga and Paulraj (2021), is a five-fold method that emphasises rigorous practice under a Guru's instruction and includes Hatha Yoga, Kundalini Pranayama, Dharana, Mantra Yoga, and Bhakti Yoga.

Methodology

To explore and understand the lived experiences of Kriya Yoga practitioners practising the Standing Recharging Exercises, with particular emphasis on their perceived physical, emotional and psychological experiences, cognitive changes and social and interpersonal relationship

Research objectives

1. To explore practitioners' personal experiences of performing Kriya Yoga Standing Recharging Exercises.
2. To understand the perceived physical sensations and bodily experiences during and after the exercises.
3. To explore perceived emotional and psychological experiences associated with regular practice.
4. To understand practitioners' cognitive changes, experiences of concentration, awareness and subjective energy.

5. To identify the meaning and significance attributed to the Standing Recharging Exercises in their daily lives.
6. To explore the changes social and interpersonal relationship

Research Questions

This qualitative research will be taken to effectively learn about the lived experiences of people with mood disorder after being diagnosed. This aimed to answer the following question:

1. How do Kriya Yoga practitioners describe their overall experiences of practising the Standing Recharging Exercises?
2. What physical experiences and perceived changes do practitioners associate with the practice?
3. How do practitioners describe their emotional and psychological experiences associated with the practice?
4. What cognitive experiences or perceived changes do practitioners report in relation to attention, concentration, memory and mental clarity?
5. How do practitioners perceive the influence of the practice on their social interactions and interpersonal relationships?
6. What personal meaning and significance do practitioners attribute to practising the Standing Recharging Exercises?

Research Design

The present study will employ a qualitative research design using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to explore and understand the lived experiences of Kriya Yoga practitioners practising the Standing Recharging Exercises. Qualitative research facilitates an in-depth understanding of individuals' experiences, perceptions, behaviours and the meanings they attribute to phenomena within their natural contexts.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is a participant-oriented qualitative approach that focuses on exploring how individuals make sense of their lived experiences. It involves an in-depth examination of participants' subjective experiences and personal interpretations of a particular phenomenon. This approach is considered appropriate for the present study as it will provide an opportunity to understand how Kriya Yoga practitioners experience and interpret the Standing Recharging Exercises in their everyday lives.

Through in-depth interviews, the study will explore participants' perceived physical, emotional and psychological experiences, cognitive changes, and social and interpersonal relationships associated with the practice.

Sample

The present study was done on 10 kriya yoga practitioners through purposive sampling. Participants were selected based on their regular practice of Standing Recharging Exercises for at least one year. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore their lived experiences.

The study focused on adults, aged 25 to 40 years old, who are practicing kriya yoga from last one year

1. Inclusion Criteria

Participants must:

1. Be adults aged 18 years and above.

2. Be practising Kriya Yoga.
3. Have practised Standing Recharging Exercises regularly for a minimum of one year.
4. Be currently engaged in the practice.
5. Be willing to participate in an individual, in-depth interview.
6. Be able to communicate their experiences clearly in English or the selected interview language.
7. Provide written informed consent.

2. Exclusion Criteria

Participants will be excluded if they:

1. Have practised Standing Recharging Exercises for less than one year.
2. Have discontinued the practice and are no longer actively engaged in it.
3. Have no direct experience of performing Standing Recharging Exercises.
4. Are unwilling to participate in audio-recorded interviews.
5. Are unable to provide informed consent.

Procedure

The study employed purposive sampling to identify and recruit 10 Kriya Yoga practitioners who had experience practising Standing Recharging Exercises regularly for a minimum period of one year. The researcher identified potential participants from among known Kriya Yoga practitioners who fulfilled the predetermined inclusion criteria. Eligible individuals were approached and invited to participate voluntarily in the study.

After obtaining their willingness to participate, the researcher explained the purpose and nature of the study, the interview procedure, and their rights as participants. Written informed consent was obtained before conducting the interviews, including consent for audio recording.

Individual semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted, each lasting approximately 30–45 minutes. Open-ended questions were used to explore participants' lived experiences of practising Standing Recharging Exercises, particularly their perceived physical, emotional, psychological and cognitive experiences.

Participants were informed that their responses would remain confidential, their identities would be protected through pseudonyms or participant codes, and they could withdraw from the study at any stage without any consequences.

All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' permission and transcribed verbatim. The collected data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis to identify meaningful patterns, experiences and themes emerging from participants' accounts.

Result and discussion

	Themes	**Possible Sub-themes**
Physical Health experiences	Enhanced physical vitality and energy Perceived improvement in physical health and immunity Improved stamina and endurance	Feeling energetic throughout the day Reduced physical fatigue Increased freshness and activeness

	Positive perception of ageing and youthfulness	Improved ability to perform daily activities Feeling younger than one's chronological age Positive perception of the ageing process Feeling physically active despite advancing age Greater confidence in physical health Feeling positive and confident as aging
Mental Health and Emotional Experiences	Improved emotional regulation Reduced stress and mental tension Enhanced inner peace and calmness Increased happiness, gratitude and positivity	Control over extreme emotions Do not take stress easily , always try to handle it with calmness High patience level Experience a sense of deep calmness and no running thought Feels happy most of the time Feel thankful to all things around
Cognitive Experiences	Improved attention and concentration Enhanced mental clarity Improved awareness and understanding of thoughts Perceived improvement in decision-making or problem-solving	Fewer racing thoughts, reduced unnecessary thinking and a quieter mind better attentional focus, increased alertness and an improved ability to remain attentive to ongoing activities.. greater clarity in thinking and finding it easier to make decisions in everyday situations
Social and Interpersonal Experiences	Enhanced Family Relationships and Connectedness Improved Communication and Social Interactions	Less reactive and more mindful in responding to situations and interpersonal interactions. Greater understanding of family members

		No complaining and criticising towards family members Greater involvement and harmony within the family
Personal Meaning and Overall Experience	Personal significance of Standing Recharging Exercises Perceived transformation through regular practice Challenges in maintaining regular practice	Recharging practice became the essential part of their daily routine and expressed difficulty imagining a day without practising them. High sense of connection-satisfaction and inner fulfilment Perceived improvements in professional functioning, career development, confidence and effectiveness at work. Holistic changes across physical, mental, emotional and professional aspects of their lives. Work commitments and personal responsibilities sometimes limited the time available for regular practice.

Conclusion

The present study explored the lived experiences of Kriya Yoga practitioners regarding the practice of Standing Recharging Exercises, with particular emphasis on their perceived physical, mental, emotional, cognitive, social and personal experiences. The findings revealed that participants associated regular practice with positive changes across multiple dimensions of their lives.

In the domain of physical health experiences, participants described enhanced physical vitality, increased energy levels, reduced fatigue and improved stamina and endurance. They also expressed positive perceptions of their physical health, immunity and ageing, with some participants reporting a greater sense of youthfulness, freshness and confidence in their physical well-being.

Regarding mental health and emotional experiences, participants described improved emotional regulation, reduced stress and mental tension, and a greater sense of inner peace and calmness. They reported experiencing greater patience, an increased ability to manage difficult situations without becoming easily distressed, and a tendency towards happiness, gratitude and positive thinking.

In the area of cognitive experiences, participants reported improved attention and concentration, enhanced mental clarity and greater awareness of their thoughts. They described experiencing fewer racing thoughts,

reduced unnecessary thinking and an increased ability to remain attentive to ongoing activities. Some participants also perceived greater clarity in everyday decision-making and problem-solving.

The findings related to social and interpersonal experiences highlighted perceived improvements in family relationships, communication and interpersonal interactions. Participants described becoming less reactive, more mindful in their responses and more understanding towards family members. They also reported reduced tendencies to complain or criticise and greater harmony and involvement within family relationships.

The theme of personal meaning and overall experience reflected the importance of Standing Recharging Exercises in participants' daily lives. For some, the practice had become an indispensable part of their routine, with a feeling that the day was incomplete without it. Participants described a sense of inner connection, satisfaction and fulfilment. They also associated regular practice with perceived personal and professional growth, increased confidence and improved work effectiveness. These experiences reflected what participants considered a holistic transformation across different areas of their lives.

Despite these perceived benefits, participants acknowledged certain challenges in maintaining regular practice. Professional commitments, family responsibilities and other personal demands sometimes restricted the time available for practice, particularly for longer or more intensive sessions. Consequently, participants occasionally missed their regular practice despite recognising its personal importance.

Overall, the findings suggest that Kriya Yoga Standing Recharging Exercises held considerable personal significance for the practitioners interviewed. Their accounts reflected perceived positive experiences across physical, emotional, cognitive, social and professional domains. The practice was described not merely as a physical exercise but as an integral part of their daily lives, associated with greater self-awareness, mindful living, emotional balance and a sense of personal fulfilment.

The study provides qualitative insights into how practitioners experience and interpret Standing Recharging Exercises in their everyday lives. However, these findings represent participants' subjective experiences and should not be interpreted as establishing causal or objectively measured effects of the practice. Further research involving larger and more diverse samples and appropriate quantitative and mixed-method approaches may help explore these experiences in greater depth.

Limitations of the Study

Small Sample Size: The study included a relatively small number of Kriya Yoga practitioners; therefore, the findings cannot be generalised to all Kriya Yoga practitioners.

Subjective Experiences: The findings were based on participants' self-reported experiences, which may have been influenced by personal beliefs, expectations and individual interpretations.

Limited Participant Diversity: Participants were selected from individuals practising Kriya Yoga Standing Recharging Exercises and may not represent the experiences of practitioners from different backgrounds or practice settings.

Retrospective Reporting: Participants described their experiences based on their recollections, which may have introduced recall bias.

Lack of Objective Measurements: Physical health, immunity, cognitive functioning and emotional well-being were not assessed using objective clinical or standardised psychological measures.

Researcher Interpretation: As the study involved qualitative analysis, the interpretation and development of themes may have been influenced by the researcher's perspectives and assumptions. Reflexive practices were important in addressing this possibility.

Recommendations for Future Research

1. Conduct studies with a larger and more diverse group of Kriya Yoga practitioners.
2. Explore the experiences of beginners and long-term practitioners comparatively.
3. Conduct longitudinal studies to understand changes in perceived well-being over time.
4. Use standardised psychological measures to explore attention, emotional regulation, stress and psychological well-being.
5. Explore the experiences of practitioners from different age groups and professional backgrounds.

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