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Role of Brahma Kumaris Rajyoga meditation on mental health among high school students: A review

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Abstract
Adolescent mental health represents a critical determinant of academic trajectory and cognitive development. High school students face severe psychological distress driven by high-stakes examinations, catastrophic threat appraisals, and somatic stress reactions. Brahma Kumaris Rajyoga Meditation (BKRM) has emerged as a distinct, non-pharmacological, open-eyed contemplative methodology that combines metacognitive observation (Sakshi Bhava) with active thought transformation (Shubh Bhavna and Shubh Chintan). This comprehensive narrative review evaluates the psychophysiological, neurobiological, and cognitive impacts of BKRM among high school populations. Empirical findings demonstrate that regular BKRM practice yields a 60% to 75% reduction in test anxiety, a 45% to 65% decrease in generalized anxiety, and an 8% to 18% improvement in high-stakes examination performance. Neurobiologically, BKRM induces a state of "relaxed alertness" characterized by elevated alpha (8–12 Hz) and low-beta electroencephalographic (EEG) coherence across frontotemporal regions, dampening of amygdalar hyperreactivity via strengthened ventromedial prefrontal cortex (vmPFC) coupling, Default Mode Network (DMN) suppression, and hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis stabilization. Physiologically, practice induces parasympathetic dominance, delivering a 70% to 76% decline in psychogenic tension headaches and restoring slow-wave and REM sleep architecture for memory consolidation. Scalable integration into school assemblies and homeroom routines aligns with global WHO Life Skills and national educational policies.

Keywords: Rajyoga Meditation, Brahma Kumaris, adolescent mental health, test anxiety, electroencephalography (EEG), cortisol, cognitive reframing, sleep architecture

Introduction

Adolescence is a critical developmental period characterized by rapid neurobiological, psychological, emotional, and social changes. During this stage, students experience increasing academic expectations, examination-related pressures, peer relationships, family expectations, and challenges associated with identity formation. These developmental and environmental factors may contribute to psychological distress, including anxiety, emotional instability, sleep disturbances, reduced self-confidence, and difficulties in concentration and behavioral regulation. When such challenges remain unmanaged, they may adversely affect students' psychological well-being, interpersonal relationships, and academic functioning. Recognizing the importance of this developmental stage, the World Health Organization (WHO, 2020) [1] emphasizes the promotion of adolescent mental health through evidence-informed psychosocial and preventive interventions.

The importance of students' psychological well-being is also reflected in contemporary educational policy. India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 [2] emphasizes holistic student development, including physical and psychological well-being, cognitive development, critical thinking, and experiential learning (Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2020) [2]. This broader educational perspective suggests that academic development should not be considered independently of students' emotional and psychological conditions. Accordingly, educational institutions need accessible and practical approaches that can support students' mental well-being alongside their academic learning.

Among the various approaches to psychological well-being, meditation has received increasing attention as a potential means of developing self-awareness, emotional regulation, attention, and stress management. Conventional mindfulness-based approaches generally emphasize present-moment awareness, non-judgmental observation of thoughts, and attention to bodily sensations and breathing. In contrast, Brahma Kumaris Rajyoga Meditation (BKRM) incorporates a distinctive spiritual and cognitive framework based on soul-consciousness (Atman), the understanding of oneself as a conscious soul rather than merely a physical body. It emphasizes the development of positive thoughts, self-awareness, mental discipline, and a conscious relationship with the Supreme Soul. Its practice generally involves meditation with open eyes, allowing individuals to maintain awareness while engaging in everyday activities.

A significant feature of BKRM is its emphasis on metacognitive detachment and constructive cognitive reframing. Metacognitive detachment refers to the ability to

observe thoughts, emotions, and reactions without becoming excessively identified with or controlled by them. Cognitive reframing involves consciously replacing negative, fearful, or unproductive thought patterns with constructive and positive perspectives. Through these processes, students may learn to respond more calmly to challenging situations, manage examination-related anxiety, improve emotional balance, and develop greater confidence in their abilities. The spiritual orientation of Rajyoga further encourages the cultivation of inner peace, self-respect, purity of thought, and positive behavioral attributes.

From a psychophysiological perspective, meditation-related changes in attention, emotional regulation, and autonomic nervous system activity provide important areas for scientific investigation. Measures such as heart rate variability (HRV), electroencephalography (EEG), cortisol levels, and sleep patterns can potentially help researchers examine the physiological correlates of contemplative practices. Similarly, cognitive processes such as working memory, concentration, cognitive flexibility, and emotional self-regulation are relevant to understanding the possible relationship between meditation and students' academic functioning. Nevertheless, these mechanisms should be examined through appropriate empirical research rather than assumed as established outcomes of every meditation practice.

BKRM may be particularly relevant to secondary school settings because it does not necessarily require specialized equipment, dedicated meditation facilities, or complex technological resources. Its relatively simple practice format may offer opportunities for integration into school-based well-being programmes, provided that the intervention is age-appropriate, culturally sensitive, voluntary, and implemented under suitable guidance. Such an approach could complement existing educational and psychosocial support systems rather than replace professional mental health services.

Despite the growing interest in meditation and student well-being, the specific contribution of Brahma Kumaris Rajyoga Meditation to the mental health and academic functioning of high school students requires further systematic examination. In particular, it is important to distinguish between the theoretical and spiritual principles of Rajyoga, the proposed psychophysiological mechanisms, and the outcomes demonstrated through empirical studies. A critical synthesis of these areas can help identify the strengths, limitations, and research gaps associated with this meditation approach.

Therefore, the present review examines the potential relationship between Brahma Kumaris Rajyoga Meditation and the mental health of high school students, with particular attention to its conceptual foundations, psychophysiological correlates, cognitive and emotional processes, and possible academic implications. It also considers the feasibility of implementing Rajyoga meditation as an accessible and potentially cost-effective supportive practice within secondary education. Through this synthesis, the review seeks to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of meditation-based approaches to adolescent psychological well-being and to identify directions for future empirical investigation.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology of BKRM

Unlike contemplative traditions that require specific physical postures (asanas), breath regulation (pranayama), or closed-eyed sensory withdrawal, BKRM is practiced with open eyes. This methodology allows practitioners to integrate meditative awareness directly into active daily tasks.

The cognitive progression of BKRM operates through three distinct, interrelated stages:

1. **Neutral Witnessing (*Sakshi Bhava*):** The practitioner adopts a detached metacognitive stance, observing negative, anxious, or chaotic thought streams without emotional reactivity or judgment.
2. **Self-Realization (*Atman*):** Identity is deliberately shifted away from external, performance-contingent markers (e.g., test scores, rank, body fatigue) toward an intrinsic spiritual core defined by innate peace, purity, and resilience.
3. **Active Thought Transformation (*Shubh Bhavna and Shubh Chintan*):** Moving beyond passive observation, the practitioner initiates active cognitive reframing. Anxious rumination and catastrophic scripts are systematically replaced with benevolent, intentional thoughts and positive self-talk.

Psychophysiological and Neurobiological Correlates

Electroencephalographic (EEG) evaluations during BKRM reveal significant neuroelectrical modulation. Practitioners exhibit elevated rhythmic coherence in the alpha band (8–12 Hz) and low-beta band across the frontal and temporal cortices. This neuroelectrical signature corresponds to a physiological state termed “relaxed alertness”, combining heightened executive focus with underlying emotional serenity.

At the circuit level, neuroimaging indicates that BKRM dampens hyperreactivity within the amygdaloid complex while enhancing functional connectivity between the ventromedial prefrontal cortex (vmPFC) and subcortical limbic structures, facilitating top-down emotional regulation. Furthermore, BKRM suppresses Default Mode Network (DMN) activity, reducing mind-wandering and task-unrelated thought, while simultaneously engaging the dorsal frontoparietal attention network.

Endocrinologically, regular BKRM regulates the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis, moderating baseline and post-stress cortisol secretion. This blunting of excessive glucocorticoid release shields vulnerable neural structures, notably the hippocampus and prefrontal cortex, from stress-induced neurotoxicity. Autonomic tracking shows a shift toward parasympathetic dominance, characterized by increased high-frequency components in heart rate variability (HRV) spectra and reduced baseline heart rate. The major psychophysiological and neurobiological domains associated with BKRM are summarized in Figure 1.

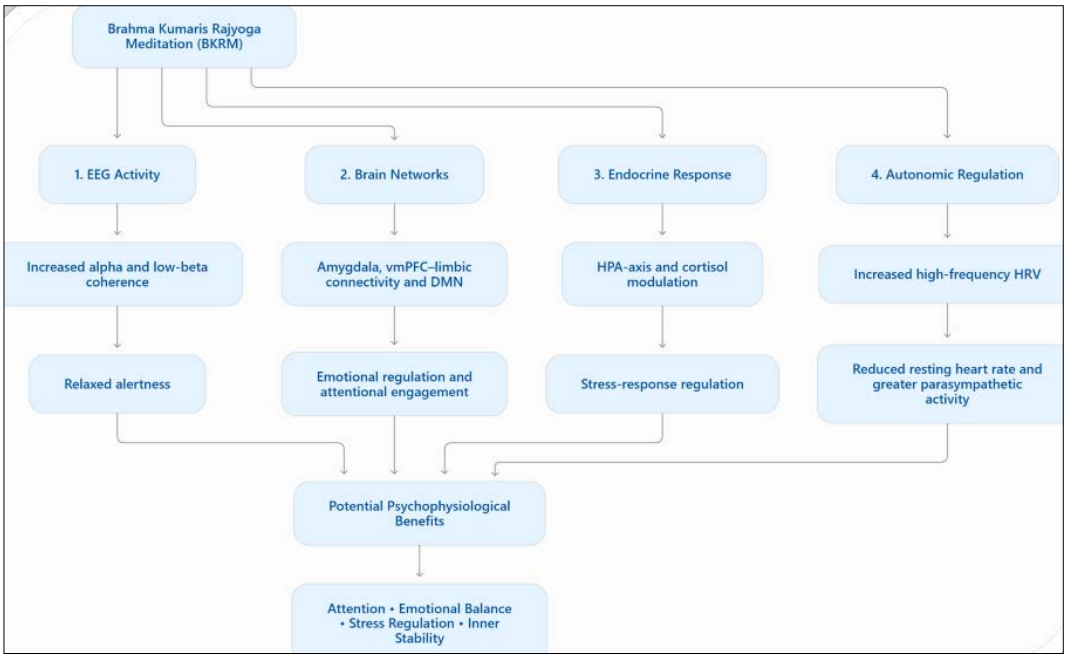

Fig 1: Psychophysiological and Neurobiological Correlates of Brahma Kumaris Rajyoga Meditation (BKRM).

Impact on Adolescent Mental Health Domains

1. Reduction of Test Anxiety and Panic

Catastrophic threat appraisals during high-stakes testing frequently overload working memory capacity. By restructuring threat appraisals into neutral challenge opportunities, BKRM deconstructs the worry-failure feedback loop. Empirical data indicate that regular 15–20 minute daily BKRM sessions achieve a 60% to 75% reduction in specific test anxiety and a 45% to 65% reduction in generalized anxiety metrics. Intensive short-term practice immediately preceding major board examinations significantly mitigates acute panic attacks.

2. Sleep Restorative Effects and Somatic Relief

Stress-induced autonomic arousal severely impairs sleep architecture, delaying sleep onset and fragmenting nocturnal sleep. BKRM reduces sleep onset latency and nocturnal awakenings, thereby restoring critical slow-wave and REM sleep stages necessary for overnight memory consolidation and neuroendocrine recovery.

Furthermore, by alleviating psychogenic somatization, BKRM produces a marked 70% to 76% reduction in tension-type headaches among secondary school students, alongside reductions in stress-related gastrointestinal discomfort.

Cognitive Functioning and Academic Performance

By blunting cortisol-mediated executive interference, BKRM preserves working memory capacity during cognitive evaluation. Neurocognitive assessments (e.g., Continuous Performance Test, Digit Symbol Substitution Test) demonstrate that trained students commit significantly fewer errors of omission and commission, reflecting improved sustained vigilance and selective attention.

These neurocognitive gains translate directly into academic metrics: student cohorts undergoing BKRM intervention show an 8% to 18% performance gain in standardized academic and board examinations compared to non-meditating controls.

Educational Policy and Curriculum Integration

BKRM requires no financial expenditure, specialized apparatus, or physical accommodation, rendering it uniquely scalable for institutional adoption. Integration strategies include:

- **Morning homeroom and assemblies:** Incorporating 10–15 minute open-eyed guided meditation into daily morning homeroom routines or school assemblies.
- **Educator professional development:** Training secondary school educators in Shubh Chintan reframing techniques to cultivate supportive, low-anxiety classroom environments.
- **Institutional policy alignment:** Mapping BKRM practices directly to global framework mandates, including the World Health Organization (WHO) Life Skills Education initiative and India's National Education Policy (NEP).

Conclusion

Brahma Kumaris Rajyoga Meditation represents an effective, evidence-based, non-pharmacological strategy for enhancing adolescent mental health and academic resilience. By combining metacognitive detachment with active thought transformation, BKRM regulates autonomic and HPA-axis function, stabilizes EEG alpha/beta coherence, reduces test anxiety, alleviates tension headaches, and optimizes sleep architecture. Educational institutions are encouraged to integrate open-eyed BKRM into daily school schedules to foster holistic student well-being.

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