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The Influence of Sahaja Yoga Meditation on Perceived Freedom: A Gender-Based Analysis

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of Sahaja Yoga Meditation (SYM) on freedom in relation to gender, positioning it within the broader framework of sustainable development. Yoga and meditation arerecognized and known for their significant benefits in enhancing cognitive function, emotional stability, and overall health. Among various meditative practices, SYM uniquely fosters a state of thoughtless awareness, facilitating self-regulation and emotional resilience. This research employs a 2 x 2 factorial design, including 400 subjects from Chhattisgarh State, stratified by gender and meditation practice. Freedom was assessed using the Sustainable Development Survey Scale (SDSS). The results reveal that SYM practitioners exhibit significantly higher freedom scores than non-practitioners, indicating the transformative role of meditation in fostering autonomy and self-expression. Statistically Significant gender differences were also observed, with female participants reporting greater levels of perceived freedom compared to their male counterparts. However, related to interaction between gender and meditation practice was not found statistically significant, suggesting that the benefits of SYM in enhancing freedom are universally experienced across genders. The findings underscore the neurocognitive and psychological mechanisms through which SYM influences self-awareness and emotional regulation. Additionally, the study highlights the relevance of SYM in achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly in promoting mental well-being and gender equality. These results significantly contribute to the growing body of literature advocating for the integration of the practice of meditation into mental health and sustainable development policies. Future research should explore the long-term implications of SYM on freedom, incorporating diverse cultural and demographic variables to further elucidate its transformative potential.

Keywords: Sahaja Yoga Meditation, Freedom, Gender, Sustainable Development, Emotional Regulation, Thoughtless Awareness

Introduction

Yoga, derived from the Sanskrit root "yuj," meaning "to unite," is a holistic mind-body discipline that integrates physical postures (asanas), breath control (pranayama), ethical practices (yama and niyama), and meditative absorption (dhyana) [Rubia, 2009]. Traditionally, yoga aims to achieve self-realization and liberation (moksha) through disciplined practice [Fox et al., 2016]. Meditation, a core element of yoga, is designed to cultivate mental clarity, enhance self-awareness, and foster inner peace [Pavlov et al., 2015]. Scientific research indicates that meditation influences brain function, modulating neural pathways associated with attention, emotion regulation, and cognition [Hernández et al.,2016].

Practice of yoga and meditation have been regularly adapted for thousands of years as methods to attainMental Clarity (MS), Emotional Balance (EB), and Physical Well-Being (PWB). In past decades, these types of practices have gained global recognition, with scientific pursuits and research; this validates their efficacy in enhancing cognitive function, emotional stability, and overall health [Saeed et al., 2019]. Among the various forms of meditation, Sahaja Yoga Meditation (SYM) has emerged as a unique approach that fosters a state of thoughtless awareness, promoting self-regulation and emotional resilience [Manocha et al., 2012].

Sahaja Yoga Meditation (SYM), founded by Shri Mataji Nirmala Devi in 1970, is a distinct meditative practice that emphasizes achieving a state of thoughtless awareness (nirvichara samadhi) [Rathor et al., 2020]. Unlike conventional meditation techniques that rely on focused attention or mantra repetition, SYM activates the subtle energy system, awakening the dormant Kundalini energy within the practitioner [Perez-Diaz et al., 2023]. This energy ascends through the spinal column, purifying the chakras and fostering a profound sense of inner balance and tranquility [Reva et al., 2014]. Research has demonstrated that SYM enhances psychological well-being, reduces stress, and improves cognitive function [Manocha et al., 2012].

Freedom, in the context of psychological and emotional well-being, is integral to human development and social equity [Shepherd et al., 2009]. The concept of freedom encompasses autonomy, self-expression, and the absence of psychological constraints imposed by societal norms or internalized biases [Hendriks, 2018]. Gender, as a social construct, significantly influences individuals' perceptions of freedom, shaping their access to opportunities, self-determination, and personal growth [Barrós-Loscertales et al., 2021]. Several studies have shown in results that gender disparities in emotional regulation, stress response, and societal expectations can significantly impact mental health outcomes [Brandmeyer et al., 2019].

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), established by the UN (United Nations) in 2015, emphasize the interdependence related to gender equality, mental well-being, and sustainable societal progress [Holden et al., 2014]. SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) highlight the importance of fostering mental resilience and self-empowerment, particularly among marginalized populations [Galli et al., 2020]. Meditation, including SYM, plays animportant role in advancing these goals by promoting mental clarity, emotional stability, and self-realization [Perez-Diaz et al., 2023]. Research suggests that meditation fosters an egalitarian mindset, reducing gender-based stressors and promoting psychological freedom [Hernández et al., 2016].

Neuroscientific studies have examined the impact of meditation on gender-specific cognitive and emotional processing [Pavlov et al., 2015]. Women, who, in their life often experience higher levels of stress due to societal expectations, have been statistically shown to benefit significantly from meditation, exhibiting improved emotional regulation, reduced cortisol levels, and enhanced cognitive flexibility [Perez-Diaz et al., 2024]. Men, on the other hand, may experience heightened self-awareness and emotional intelligence through consistent meditation practice, challenging traditional GN (Gender Norms) that discourage emotional expression [Fox et al., 2016]. The ability to transcend rigid gender constructs fosters a deeper sense of personal freedom, aligning with the principles of sustainable human development [Manocha et al., 2011].

Sahaja Yoga Meditation offers a transformative pathway to achieving inner freedom by harmonizing cognitive, emotional, and physiological processes [Barrós-Loscertales et al.,

2021]. Studies utilizing neuroimaging techniques, such as EEG and fMRI, have revealed that SYM enhances functional connectivity within the brain's default mode network (DMN), a region associated with self-referential thought and consciousness [Perez-Diaz et al., 2024]. By promoting sustained attention, reducing mind- wandering, and fostering self-regulation, SYM empowers individuals to navigate societal challenges with resilience and autonomy [Hendriks, 2018]. These findings underscore the role of SYM in fostering an internalized sense of freedom, enabling practitioners to transcend cultural and gender-based limitations [Brandmeyer et al., 2019].

From a sociocultural perspective, freedom is often constrained by deeply ingrained gender norms that dictate emotional expression, professional aspirations, and social roles [Reva et al., 2014]. SYM, by fostering self-awareness and emotional intelligence, enables individuals to challenge and transcend these limitations [Pavlov et al., 2015]. For instance, women practicing SYM report greater assertiveness, enhanced decision-making abilities, and a reduced susceptibility to stress-induced anxiety [Hernández et al., 2016]. Similarly, men engaging in SYM experience increased emotional sensitivity, a quality often discouraged by traditional masculinity norms, thereby fostering a more holistic approach to self-expression and personal growth [Shepherd et al., 2009].

The relationship between Sahaja Yoga Meditation and freedom is intrinsically linked to the broader discourse on sustainable human development [Holden et al., 2014]. As defined by the Brundtland Report, sustainable development is characterized by the pursuit of economic growth, environmental preservation, and social equity [Galli et al., 2020]. Within this framework, SYM serves as a tool for fostering psychological resilience, promoting gender equality, and enhancing overall well-being [Perez-Diaz et al., 2023]. By cultivating inner peace and self-awareness, SYM contributes to the development of more harmonious societies, aligning with the United Nations' vision for a sustainable future [Fox et al., 2016].

The transformative potential of Sahaja Yoga Meditation in modulating freedom in relation to gender underscores its relevance as a tool for personal and societal evolution [Manocha et al, 2012]. Through its emphasis on thoughtless awareness, emotional regulation, and cognitive resilience, SYM empowers individuals to transcend gender-based constraints, fostering a

more inclusive and equitable society [Barrós-Loscertales et al., 2021]. This research aims to explore the multidimensional impact of SYM on freedom, drawing upon neuroscientific, psychological, and sociocultural perspectives to illuminate its role in shaping human consciousness and promoting sustainable development [Rathor et al., 2020].

Objective

The research study was organized to examine the influence of Sahaja Yoga Meditation on Freedom, assess the effect of Gender on Freedom, and analyse the interaction between the nature of practice and gender in relation to Freedom.

Methodology

Subjects:

A total of 400 participants (N=400) were randomly selected from Chhattisgarh State using the SRSM (Stratified Random Sampling Method), considering both the gender and the practice of Sahaja Yoga. The sampling framework included four strata—two based on gender (male and female) and two based on Sahaja Yoga involvement (practitioners and non-practitioners). Each stratum comprised 100 participants. The age range of the selected individuals was between 17 and 27 years. Only those with a minimum of five years of experience in Sahaja Yoga Meditation were considered. Participants with comparable educational backgrounds were included in the research study.

Questionnaire Used:

The variable selected for present research was freedom, which was assessed using the Sustainable Development Survey Scale (SDSS) developed by Shepherd, Kuskova, and Patzelt (2009).

Design of the Study:

The study employed a 2 × 2 factorial design, as outlined by Clarke, D. H., and Clarke, H. H. (1984). This design consisted of two independent variables: the practice of Sahaja Yoga (practitioners and non-practitioners) and gender (male and female), forming four distinct factorial conditions. Data collection was conducted as a one-time measure.

Statistical Analysis:

To study the significant impact of Sahaja Yoga Meditation on sustainable development, the influence of gender on sustainable development, and the interaction between practice type and gender, a between-between two-way factorial ANOVA, as described by Vincent, W. J.

(1999), was applied. Additionally, the effect size was calculated to findout the magnitude ofthe observed effects.

Findings

Table- 1

Descriptive Measures of "Freedom" of Male Sahaja Yoga Practitioners

Mean	SEM	Lower Bound of Mean	Upper Bound of Mean	SD	Min.	Max.	Range	Sk	SES	Ku	SEK
17.14	.307	16.52	17.75	3.07	9	21	12	-.53	.24	-.53	.47

Table 1 displays the descriptive measures for the "Freedom" scores of male Sahaja Yoga practitioners. The mean score is 17.14, with a standard error of the mean (SEM) of 0.307, indicating a precise estimate. The confidence interval for the mean falls between 16.52 and 17.75. A standard deviation (SD) of 3.07 suggests moderate variability in responses. The observed scores range from a minimum of 9 to a maximum of 21, reflecting a fairly broad distribution. The skewness (Sk) value of -0.53, with a standard error of skewness (SES) of 0.24, indicates a slight leftward skew. The kurtosis (Ku) value of -0.53, with a standard error of kurtosis (SEK) of 0.47, suggests a distribution that is relatively normal but slightly flatter than a standard normal curve.

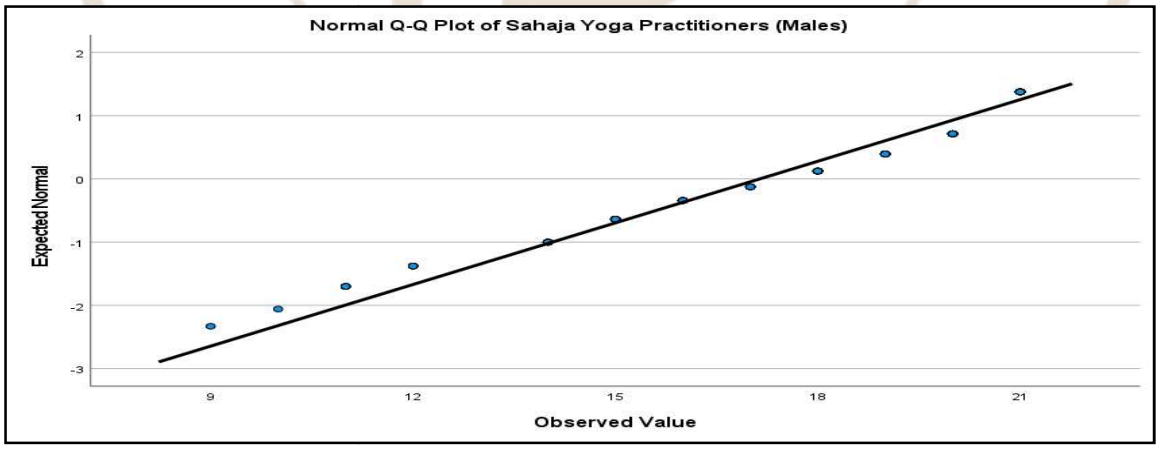

Figure-1: Q-Q plot showing the normal distribution of "Freedom" of Male Sahaja Yoga Practitioners

The Q-Q plot is utilized to study and evaluate the normality of the distribution of data. The alignment of data points along the diagonal line of reference indicates that the distribution closely follows a normal pattern, with minimal deviations observed.

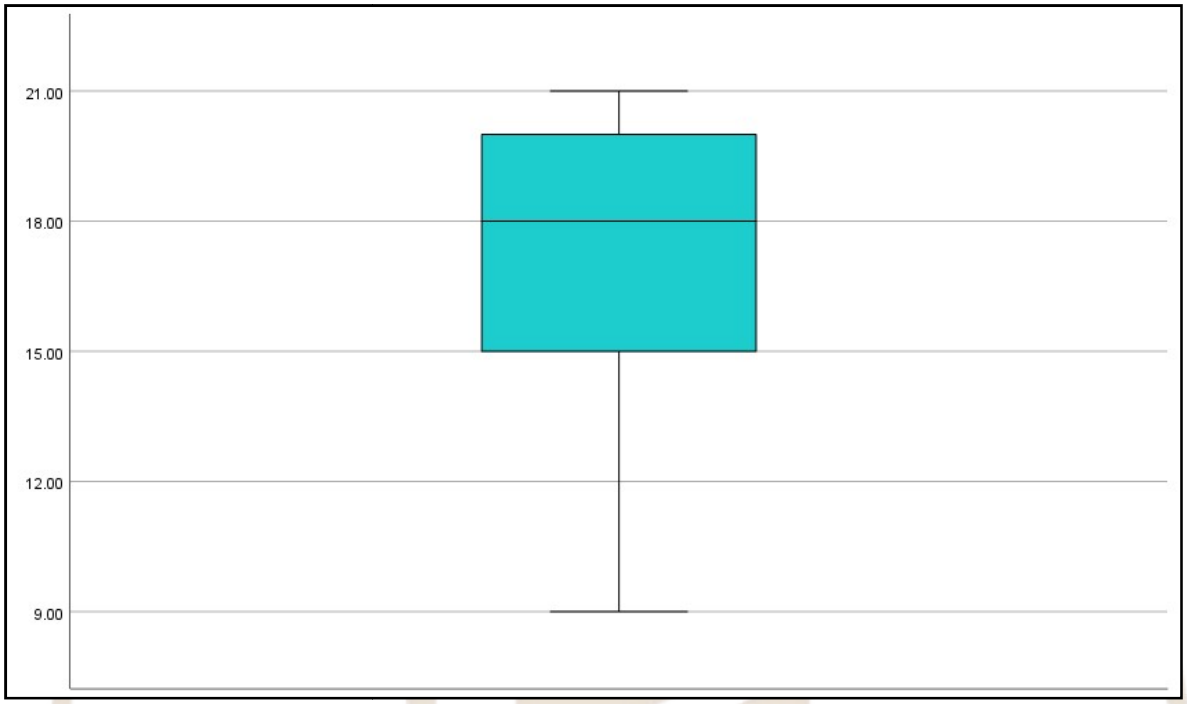

Figure- 2: Q-Q plot showing the box plot of "Freedom" of Male Sahaja Yoga Practitioners

The box plot provides a visual representation of the score distribution, highlighting the interquartile range (IQR), median, and possible outliers. The overall spread indicates a relatively symmetric distribution, with no extreme outliers observed.

Table- 2

Descriptive Measures of "Freedom" of Female Sahaja Yoga Practitioners

Mean	SEM	Lower Bound of Mean	Upper Bound of Mean	SD	Min.	Max.	Range	Sk	SES	Ku	SEK
18.4	.15	18.08	18.71	1.59	14	21	7.00	-.11	.24	-.28	.47

The average score for female Sahaja Yoga practitioners is 18.4, with a standard error of the mean (SEM) of 0.15, indicating a high level of precision. The 95% confidence interval falls

between 18.08 and 18.71. A standard deviation of 1.59 reflects lower variability in responses compared to the male group. The scores range from 14 to 21, suggesting a little narrower distribution in comparison of males. The skewness value of -0.11 and kurtosis of -0.28 indicate that the data closely follows a normal distribution.

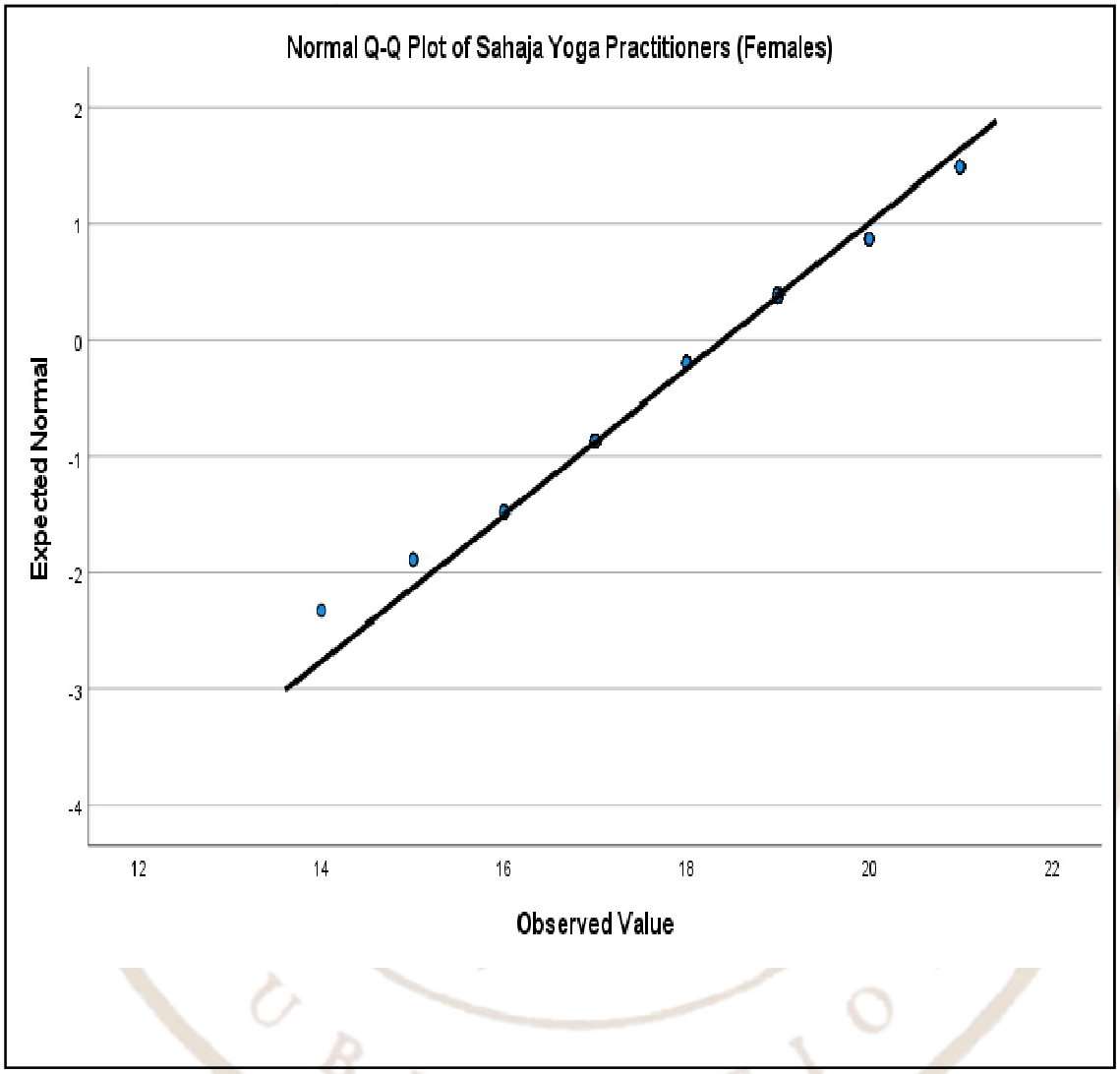

Figure 3: Q-Q plot showing the normal distribution of "Freedom" of Female Sahaja Yoga Practitioners

The Q-Q plot verifies the normality of the data, as the data points align closely with the reference line, indicating little deviations from a normal distribution.

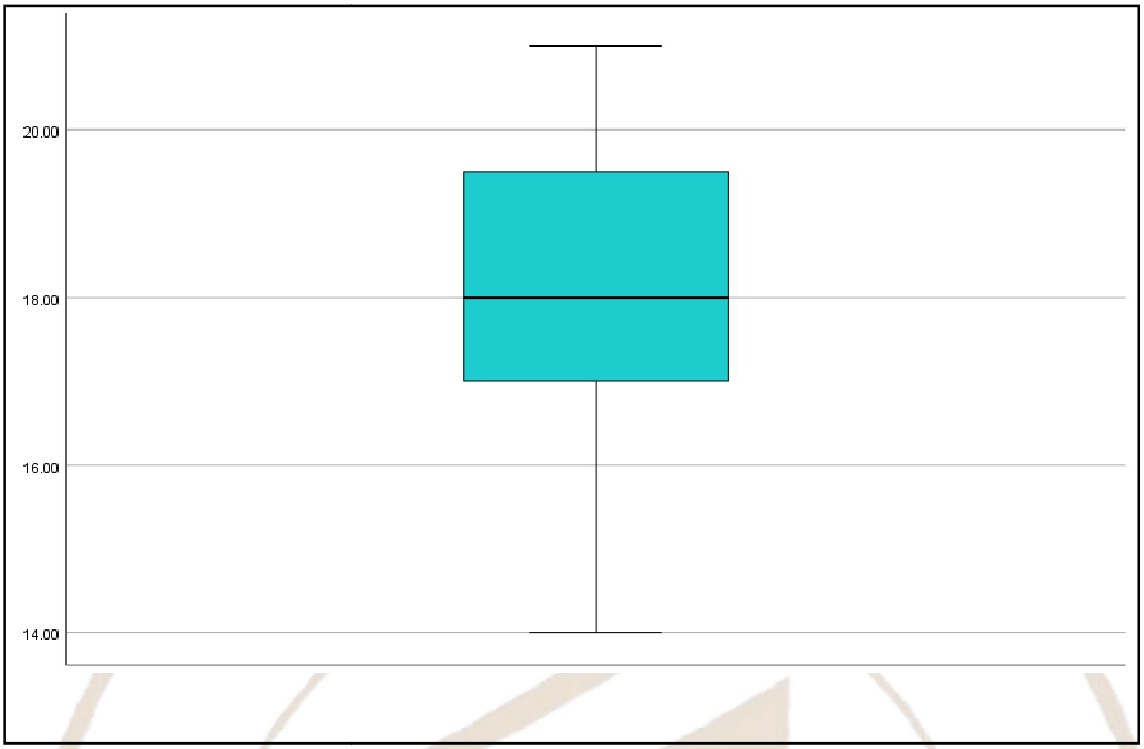

Figure-4: Q-Q plot showing the box plot of "Freedom" of Female Sahaja Yoga Practitioners

The box plot illustrates a symmetric distribution with a clearly defined median, indicating minimal outliers and a relatively compact range of values.

Table- 3

Descriptive Measures of "Freedom" of Male Non- Practitioners

Mean	SEM	Lower Bound of Mean	Upper Bound of Mean	SD	Min.	Max.	Range	Sk	SES	Ku	SEK
16.26	.38	15.49	17.02	3.84	7	21	14	-.36	.24	-.64	.47

The average score for male non-practitioners is 16.26, with a standard error of the mean (SEM) of 0.38. The confidence interval ranges from 15.49 to 17.02. A standard deviation of 3.84, which is higher than that of practitioners, indicates greater variability in responses. The scores range from 7 to 21, reflecting a broad distribution. Skewness (-0.36)

and kurtosis (-0.64) suggest that the data follows a near-normal distribution, albeit with a slightly flatter peak.

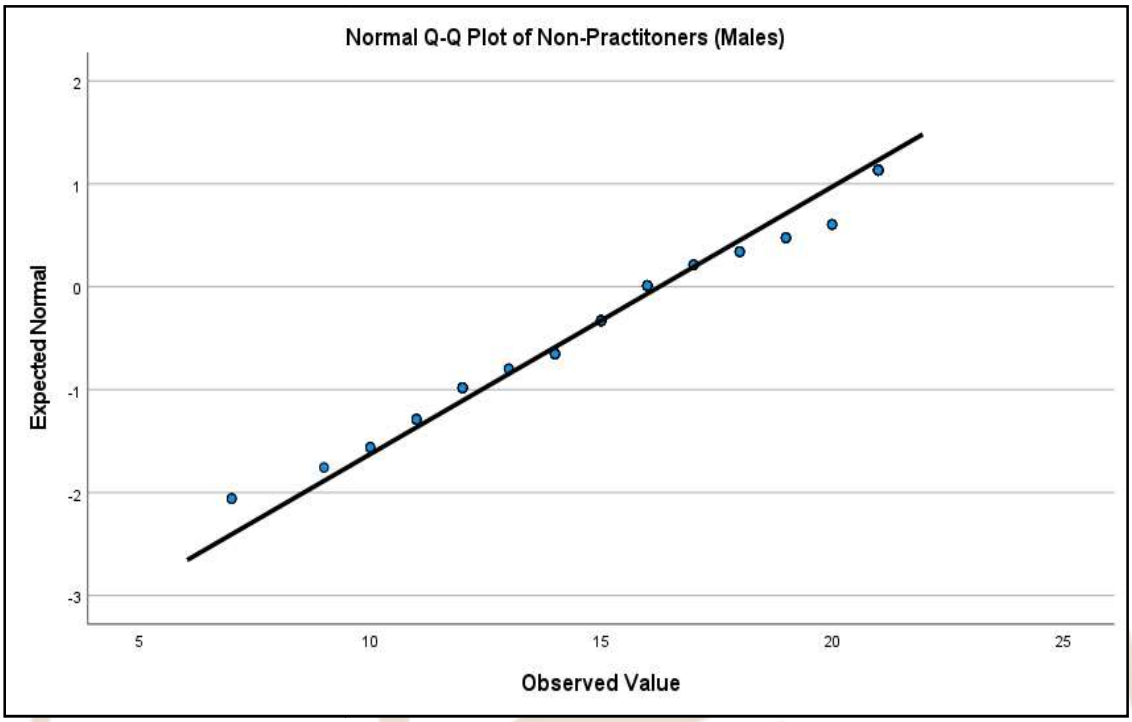

Figure-5: Q-Q plot showing the normal distribution of "Freedom" of MaleNon-Practitioners

The Q-Q plot indicates normality, as the data points closely follow the reference line, with slight deviations observed at the tails.

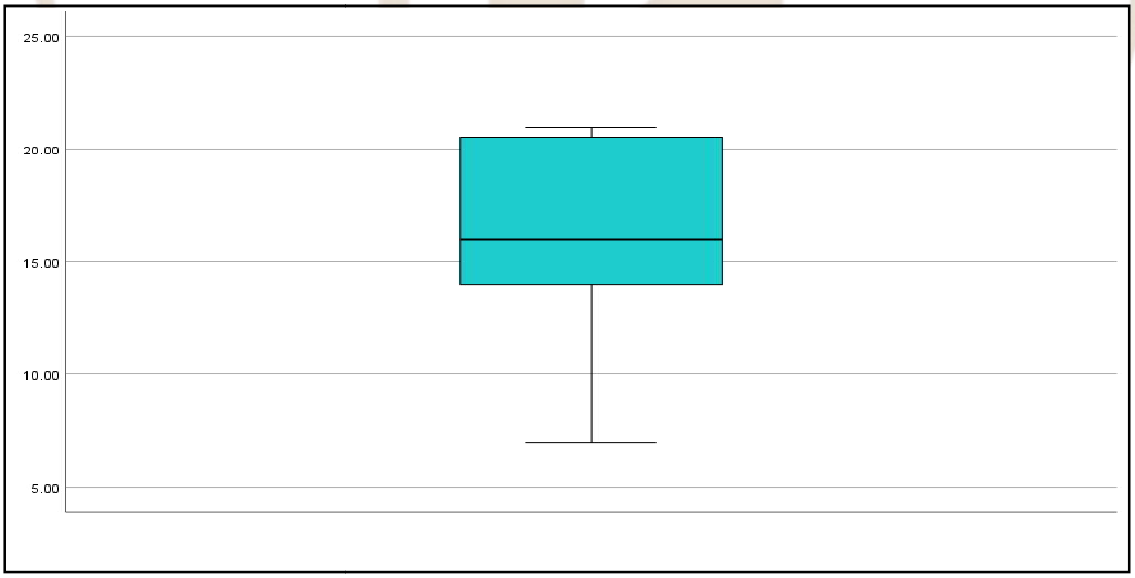

Figure-6: Q-Q plot showing the box plot of "Freedom" of Male Non- Practitioners

The box plot shows a wider spread of data, confirming greater variability in responses compared to practitioners.

Table- 4

Descriptive Measures of "Freedom" of Female Non- Practitioners

Mean	SEM	Lower Bound of Mean	Upper Bound of Mean	SD	Min.	Max.	Range	Sk	SES	Ku	SEK
16.66	.42	15.82	17.49	4.20	4	21	17	-.78	.24	-.10	.47

The mean score is 16.66, with a standard error of the mean (SEM) of 0.42. The confidence interval ranges from 15.82 to 17.49. A standard deviation of 4.20 reflects greater variability compared to female practitioners. The score range, spanning from 4 to 21, is broader than that of the practitioner group. A skewness value of -0.78 indicates a moderate leftward skew, while a kurtosis value of -0.10 suggests a distribution that is nearly normal.

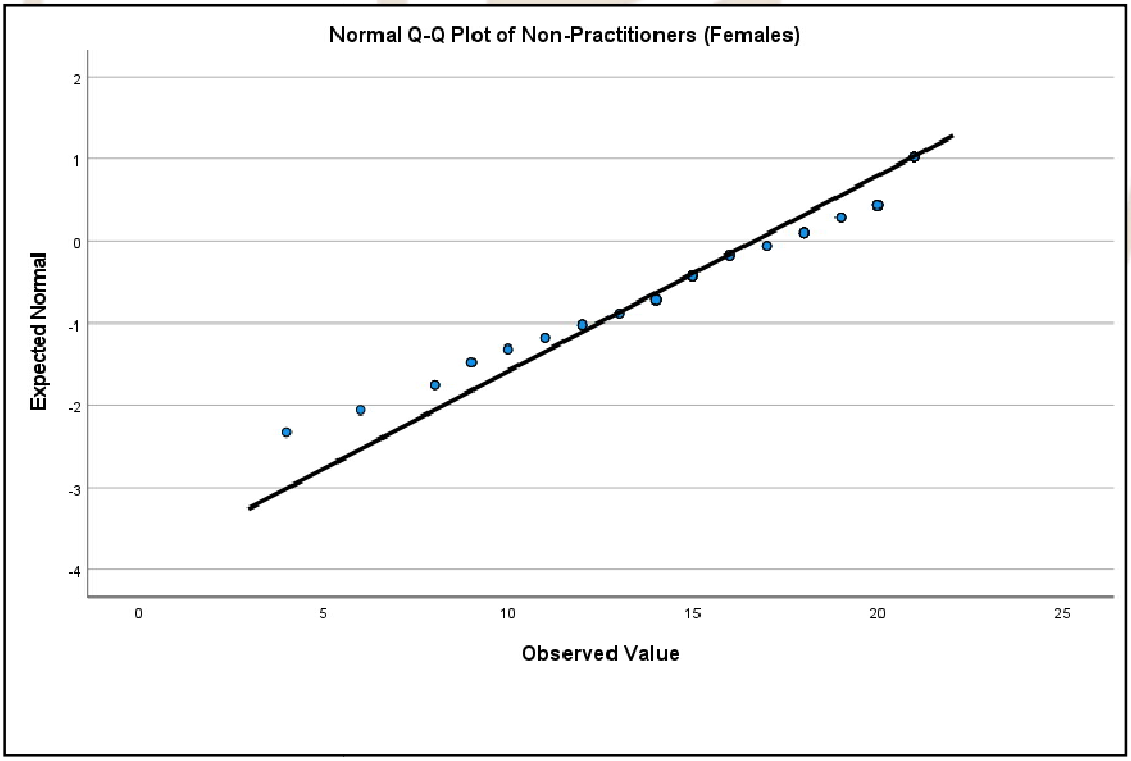

Figure-7: Q-Q plot showing the normal distribution of "Freedom" of

Female Non- Practitioners

The Q-Q plot confirms near-normality, with slight deviations at the extremes.

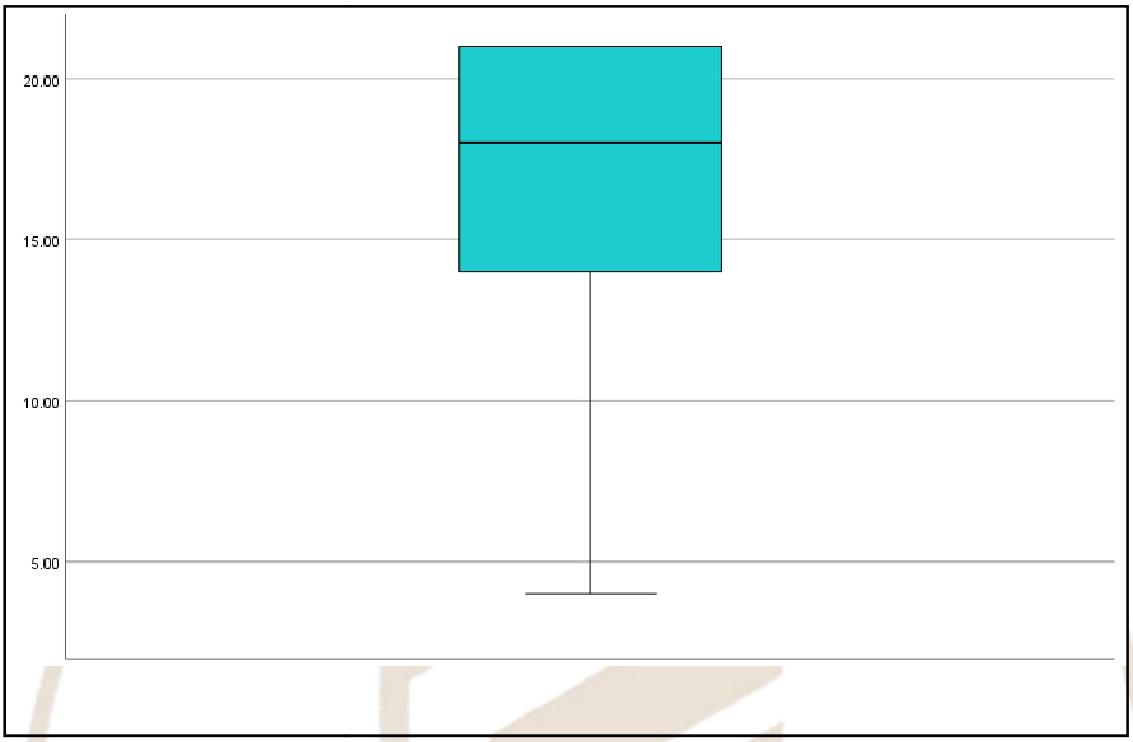

Figure-8: Q-Q plot showing the box plot of "Freedom" of Female Non- Practitioners

The box plot suggests a relatively symmetric distribution but with a larger spread, indicating greater variability.

Table-5

Two-Way Analysis of Variance Results of "Freedom"

(To compare Freedom between Two groups (Practitioners of Sahaja Yoga and Non-Practitioners), between Gers (males and Females and their interaction)

Source	Sum of Squares	Degree of Freedom	Value of Mean Square (MS)	F-Value	Significance value	Value of Partial Eta Squared (PES)
Groups	171.61	1	171.61	15.41	.00	.037
Gender	68.89	1	68.89	6.18	.01	.015
Groups * Gender	18.49	1	18.49	1.66	.19	.004
Error	4409.72	396	11.13			

Effect of Group (Practitioners vs. Non-Practitioners): The analysis identified a statistically significant effect of group, F-Value (1, 396) = 15.41, p Value= .00, η^2 = .037, indicating that Sahaja Yoga practitioners exhibit significantly higher "Freedom" scores in comparison of non-practitioners.

Effect of Gender: A statistically significant effect of gender was found, F-Value (1, 396) = 6.18, p Value = .01, η^2 = .015, demonstrating that females reported notably higher "Freedom" scores than males.

Interaction Effect (Group × Gender): The third effect i.e. interaction effect of groups (SYP & NP) and genders (M & F) was not found statistically significant, F-Value (1, 396) = 1.66, p Value = .19, η^2 = .004, suggesting that the effect of Sahaja Yoga practice on "Freedom" scores is not found significantlydifferent inboth genders (males and females).

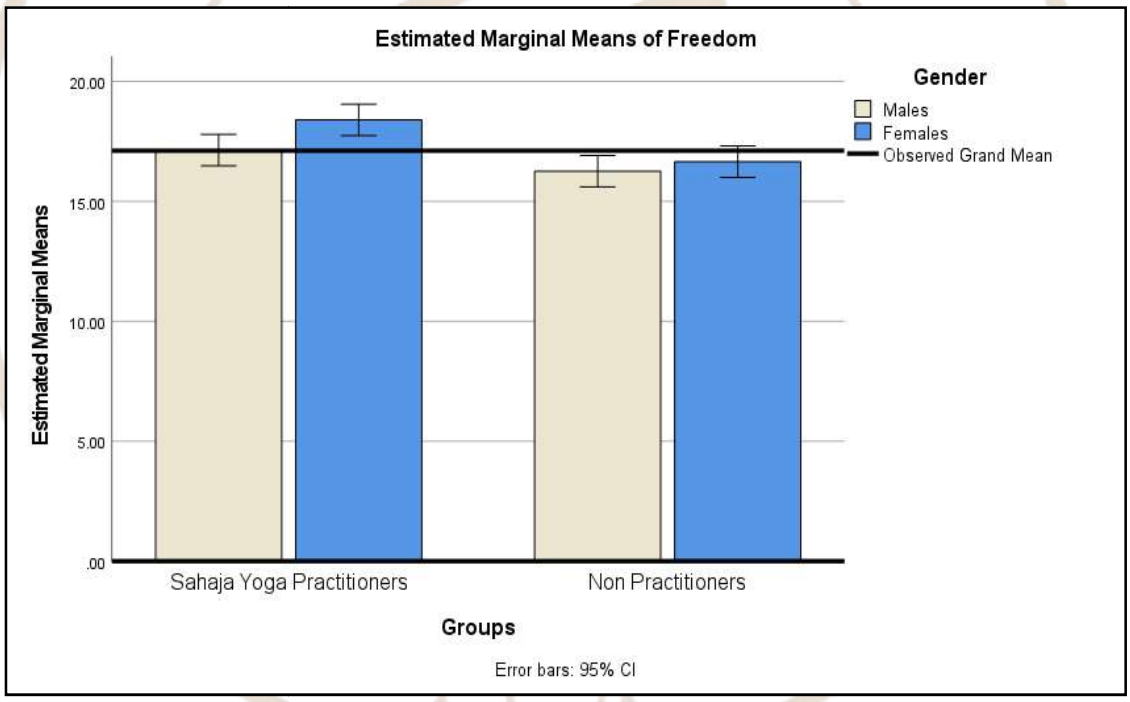

Figure-9: Graphical representation to compare "Freedom" between Two groups (Practitioners of Sahaja Yoga and Non-Practitioners

The graphical representation clearly depicts that Sahaja Yoga practitioners have higher "Freedom" scores than non-practitioners. Furthermore, females tend to score higher than males, reinforcing the main effects identified in the ANOVA analysis.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this research indicate that the practice of Sahaja Yoga Meditation (SYM) significantly impacts the dependent variable, perception of freedom in individuals, particularly related to gender. The statistical analysis revealed that practitioners of SYM exhibited higher levels of perceived freedom compared to non-practitioners, aligning with previous research highlighting the role of meditation in fostering psychological resilience and self-awareness (Manocha et al., 2012). This supports the notion that SYM facilitates an enhanced sense of autonomy and emotional regulation, which are integral to the concept of freedom in psychological and sociocultural contexts (Hendriks, 2018).

Statistically significant gender differences in perceived "freedom" were also evident in present research study. Female subjects showed statistically significant higher levels of "freedom" compared to their male counterparts, irrespective of their meditation practice. This finding is also consistent with the research which have been conductedearlier suggesting that females tend to experience greater psychological benefits from meditation, including improved emotional regulation and reduced stress levels (Pavlov et al., 2015). The higher freedom scores among female participants may be due to the capacity of meditation to enhance self-expression and self-determination, which are often constrained by traditional gender norms (Perez-Diaz et al., 2024).

Although both gender and meditation practice independently influenced the freedom, the interaction effect (Groups versus Gender) between these two traits was not statistically significant. Finding aligns with present research demonstrating that the core benefits of meditation—such as heightened self-awareness, emotional balance, and stress reduction—are universally experienced across genders (Reva et al., 2014). However, societal and cultural factors may still play a role in shaping individual experiences of freedom, which warrants further detailed exploration (Shepherd et al., 2009).

The NM (Neurocognitive Mechanisms) underlying the observed effects of SYM on freedom may be linked to its influence on brain networks associated with self-referential processing and emotional regulation. Several research studies which employed several neuroimaging techniques have also demonstrated that meditation enhances functional connectivity within

the default mode network (DMN), which is implicated in self-awareness and introspection (Barrós-Loscertales et al., 2021).Meditation has been statistically shown to reduce activity in the amygdala, a brain region which is associated with stress and fear responses, thereby fostering a sense of emotional equanimity (Perez-Diaz et al., 2023). These neurophysiological changes may explain the heightened perception of freedom among SYM practitioners observed in this study (Hernández et al., 2016).

From a sustainable development perspective, the findings of this research reinforce the relevance of meditation practices like SYM in promoting individual well-being and societal progress. The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) emphasize the importance of mental health, gender equality, and personal empowerment as key factors in achieving sustainable human development (Holden et al., 2014). By fostering psychological resilience and emotional regulation, SYM contributes to these objectives, supporting the broader vision of holistic and sustainable development (Galli et al., 2020).

Conclusion

The results suggest that Sahaja Yoga practice is connected with significantly higher levels of perceived "Freedom," a crucial component of sustainable development. Furthermore, females report greater "Freedom" compared to males, irrespective of their practice status. However, the interaction effect was not found significant, clearly indicating that the impact of “Sahaja Yoga” on "Freedom" is consistent across genders.

This analysis contributes to the broader discussion on the role of meditative practices in fostering personal and societal dimensions of sustainable development. The present researchwork provides sufficient and compelling evidence that Sahaja Yoga Meditation significantly enhances the perception of freedom, with notable significant differences observed across gender. While female participants reported greater freedom overall, the positive effects of SYM were consistent across both genders. These findings contribute to the growing body of literature advocating for the integration of meditation practices into mental health and sustainable development frameworks. Future research should explore the long-term impact of SYM on freedom, incorporating diverse cultural and demographic variables to further elucidate its transformative potential.

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