

School-based yoga can help children better manage stress and anxiety

April 10, 2018 9:00 AM

Keith Brannon
kbrannon@tulane.edu
504-862-8789



Tulane public health researchers worked with a public school to implement yoga and mindfulness activities before classes to help third-graders with anxiety. Photo by ThinkStock.

Participating in yoga and mindfulness activities at school helps third-graders exhibiting anxiety improve their well-being and emotional health, according to a new Tulane University study published in the journal *Psychology Research and Behavior Management*.

Researchers worked with a public school in New Orleans to add mindfulness and yoga to the school's existing empathy-based programming for students needing supplementary support. Third-graders who were screened for symptoms of anxiety at the beginning of the school year were randomly assigned to two groups. A control group of 32 students received care as usual, which included counseling and other activities led by a school social worker.

The intervention group of 20 students participated in small group yoga/mindfulness activities for eight weeks using a Yoga Ed curriculum. Students attended the small group activities at the beginning of the school day. The sessions included breathing exercises, guided relaxation and

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several traditional yoga poses appropriate for children.

Researchers evaluated each group's health-related quality of life before and after the intervention, using two widely recognized research tools. The Brief Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale-Peabody Treatment Progress Battery version was used to assess life satisfaction, and the Pediatric Quality of Life Inventory was used to assess psychosocial conditions and emotional well-being at the beginning, middle and end of the study.

"The intervention improved psychosocial and emotional quality-of-life scores for students, as compared to their peers who received standard care," said principal author [Alessandra Bazzano](#), associate professor of global community health and behavioral sciences at Tulane University School of Public Health. "We also heard from teachers about the benefits of using yoga in the classroom, and they reported using yoga more often each week, and throughout each day in class, following the professional development component of intervention."

Researchers targeted third grade because it is a crucial time of transition for elementary students when academic expectations increase.

"Our initial work found that many kids expressed anxious feelings in third grade as the classroom work becomes more developmentally complex," Bazzano said. "Even younger children are experiencing a lot of stress and anxiety, especially around test time."

Co-authors of the study include Jeanette Gustat, clinical associate professor of epidemiology, and Christopher Anderson, a doctoral student in epidemiology at Tulane, along with local community partner Chelsea Hylton of Project Peaceful Warriors. The study was funded by the [Phyllis M. Taylor Center for Social Innovation and Design Thinking](#) and the [Center for Public Service at Tulane University](#).