

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Holistic Health, Yoga and Social Change Among Young Women in the Arabian Gulf Post-COVID-19

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Abstract

The environment guides human imagination and steers life processes. In times of adversity, like during the COVID-19 pandemic, the imagination of both sexes was stimulated and formed new experiences in the mind that reshaped the way of social interaction and order between all members of society. In the pursuit of survival and staying well, many young adults in the Arab Gulf region, mostly female, explored holistic health to prevent infection with inspired creativity. As women face more challenges in life than men and have different future needs, COVID-19 appears to have stimulated the social acceptance of gender empowerment. In large part this was due to a combination of two elements - national female empowerment projects; provided by increased market opportunities and certain freedoms, like driving an automobile and the freedom to live alone; and interest in Holistic Health preventions, imagined as an efficient way not only for preventing infection and family chronic diseases in old age but also increasing intergenerational social harmony. Outdoors Yoga was such an intervention independently sought by YAW. Based on personal conversations (N=800, ages between 21 yrs. and 31 yrs.) in three Arab Gulf countries between 2022 and 2023, this paper reviews the effect of the imagination on gender behavioral choices for staying alive and well in the new environment of uncertainty. It found that Covid-19 unequivocally strengthened the female element's role in society's affairs.

Keywords: Holistic Health, Mental Resilience, Public Health, COVID-19 Pandemic, Women's Health, Social Change, Arabian Gulf

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1. INTRODUCTION

The health crisis caused by COVID-19, a disease that disrupts cellular structures, created unprecedented struggles for survival worldwide. The pandemic measures, particularly during the lockdown years, reshaped societal norms, stimulating imagination and challenging traditional gender roles in the Arabian Gulf region. These shifts were driven by local needs and realities, which amplified the rethinking of life processes and behavioral patterns.

Gender roles are typically given by society as a way to structure and organize the orderly social and economic interaction between its members (Eccles, 1987). These roles, usually assigned by age and sex to maintain family and social harmony, provide a conventional or legal framework for women and men in which their rights and responsibilities are made clear in a public context (Eagly & Wood, 2012; Araújo-Pinzón et al., 2017). In the Gulf region, it is customary for extended or nuclear families to live under one roof, fostering economic security, strengthening kinship, and preparing younger generations for their roles in society. Although the traditional family model has been adopted since antiquity, the COVID-19 pandemic exposed fractures in this model, surfacing psychological tensions and moral dilemmas that undermined its effectiveness.

The challenges brought by the pandemic were affected by the emotional and economic strain of medical solutions—ranging from controversial vaccinations to claustrophobic isolation and the overwhelming burden of care for both young and elderly family members (Schliehe et al., 2022). These conditions highlighted existing gender inequalities, with women bearing a disproportionate share of responsibilities. Already economically empowered through market participation policies, many young adult women (YAWs) in the Gulf region sought solace and solutions through imagination, which became a driving force for transformative change.

The pandemic accelerated shifts in lifestyle and family structures. Rising rates of family

conflict, including violence against women and a notable 35% increase in divorces in 2020 compared to 2019, underscored the urgency of change (Lanchimba et al., 2023). Empowered by newly granted freedoms, such as the ability to drive and live independently, many YAWs turned to nature and holistic health practices as means of self-empowerment and emotional renewal. Outdoor yoga emerged as a prominent choice, enabling them to envision and achieve lifestyles centered on well-being and independence. Common phrases shared during interviews, such as "live the moment," "exercise outdoors," and "do something different to make your life happier," revealed an emerging ethos among YAWs. This shift in mindset not only surprised societal observers but also validated the resilience and agency of these women in adapting to post-pandemic realities. This study aims to explore how young adult women in the Arabian Gulf reimagined holistic health and embraced yoga as a tool for wellness and self-empowerment during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Holistic health practices, particularly yoga, have gained increased attention as practical tools for managing stress, anxiety, and overall well-being, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Existing literature combines practices within the scope of mental health, imagination, and gender dynamics, all while reflecting the distinct challenges faced by young adult women.

The COVID-19 pandemic, as highlighted by Almeida et al. (2020), had diverse effects on women, especially on mental health globally, with stressors including caregiving burdens, economic instability, and exposure to domestic violence being amplified during lockdowns. According to observations by Connor et al. (2020), the pandemic caused exacerbation of preexisting gender-based health disparities during the pandemic, thereby creating unique vulnerabilities for women in reproductive, mental, and social health contexts.

Yoga, with its deeply rooted traditions and modern adaptations, has evolved into a global practice intricately tied to health and well-being. Anne-Cécile Hoyez (2007) describes yoga as a therapeutic landscape and a product of global cultural exchange. Her analysis of yogic spaces in India and France illustrates how these landscapes blend physical, emotional, and spiritual healing, making yoga an adaptable global practice. This dependence between local traditions and global practices is further emphasized by Shaw and Kaytaz (2021), who contextualize modern postural yoga as a practice shaped by transnational influences, promoting health and wellness through physical postures, breathing techniques, and meditation. Leledaki (2012) delves into the narratives of modern yoga practitioners, revealing how personal health stories are intertwined with embodied practices. Her work highlights the role of yoga as both a discipline and a tool for self-actualization, aligning with neoliberal ideals of individualism and self-improvement. Similarly, Hauser (2021) introduces the "health imaginary" concept, illustrating how modern yoga combines personal health care and spiritual aspirations. Such dynamic practice resonates across diverse social and cultural contexts for addressing individual and collective health needs. Yoga also emerges as a prominent intervention during crises, combining physical postures with mindfulness practices to alleviate stress and promote resilience. Sahni et al. (2021) demonstrate that yoga practitioners reported significantly lower levels of anxiety, depression, and stress during lockdown periods compared to non-practitioners, positioning yoga as an effective self-management strategy for maintaining mental health. Similarly, Kulkarni et al. (2022) synthesized evidence from systematic reviews to underline the positive effects of yoga on mental health, particularly in reducing symptoms of anxiety and enhancing emotional stability during isolation. Holistic health, a concept that elegantly intertwines well-being's physical, mental, and spiritual dimensions, has gained remarkable prominence in recent years.

Healers in Africa, who in their practice rely on holistic approaches to women's health, paint a vivid picture of how emotional and spiritual well-being remain inseparable from physical health and are a fine example. Thus, Nelms and Gorski (2006) eloquently uncovered the necessity of harmonizing traditional and modern health practices, particularly for marginalized communities with scarce resources and high stakes. The delicate relationship of imagination and health deepens this view, offering a transformative lens through which one can grasp the profound mechanisms at work. Margolin et al. (2011) shed light on how meditation and visualization—hallmarks of yoga—not only enhance self-awareness but also serve as powerful antidotes to anxiety, particularly for women navigating heightened stress. Nagarathna et al. (2021) discussed that there are two functions yoga provides, both a physical discipline and a mental refuge. The ability of this approach to fortify physical endurance while nurturing mental resilience presents yoga as a sustainable path to offset the heavy psychological toll of restrictive environments like pandemic lockdowns. Coppola et al. (2021) captured the essence of spiritual practices as a lifeline during the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, spiritual rituals emerge not as mere traditions but as vital coping mechanisms that reduce stress and foster mental resilience, even amidst prolonged isolation. Extending this thread, Boccaccio et al. (2024) delve into mental imagery, illustrating its ability to facilitate emotional regulation and cognitive reframing. Through this lens, imagination transcends its abstract nature to become an empowering tool that enables individuals to confront crises with renewed agency and adaptive strength.

However, as Larki et al. (2021) observe, structural barriers such as limited access to health services and entrenched sociocultural norms continue to hinder women's ability to engage with such practices fully. The pandemic exposed gaps in healthcare access and reproductive rights, further emphasizing the need for inclusive and adaptable health

interventions. In synthesizing these perspectives, it becomes evident that the convergence of yoga, imagination, and mental health presents a transformative opportunity for addressing the unique challenges faced by women during the pandemic. These practices offer immediate relief from stress and lay the groundwork for long-term resilience, underscoring their relevance in contemporary health strategies.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore how young adult women (YAW) in the Arabian Gulf region reimagined holistic health and engaged in yoga during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Between 2022 and 2023, 800 semi-structured personal conversations were conducted with women aged 21 to 31 across Oman, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. Participants were purposively sampled based on their engagement with yoga or holistic health practices during this period. Ethical approval was secured, and participant anonymity was maintained throughout the study.

Thematic analysis was employed to identify key patterns, focusing on the concept of holistic health, its emergence during the review, the role of imagination, and the changes in perceptions and practices since COVID-19:

- concept of holistic health: foundational principles of holistic health are explored, emphasizing its integration of physical, mental, and spiritual dimensions. The stage is set for understanding how the concept resonates with the experiences of young women in the Arabian Gulf;

- emergence during the review: the prominence of holistic health practices, particularly yoga, during the pandemic is examined. Socio-cultural and psychological factors driving this shift are highlighted;

- role of imagination: cognitive and emotional mechanisms through which imagination supported adaptation to the challenges of COVID-19 are analyzed. Its role

in fostering resilience and redefining wellness practices is emphasized;

- changes since COVID-19: transformations in health perceptions, lifestyle choices, and gender roles prompted by the pandemic are reflected. Connections to broader themes of social change and public health are drawn.

The approach aligns with similar studies, such as Kulkarni et al. (2022), which investigated yoga's benefits during COVID-19 in India, highlighting the relevance of qualitative methods for understanding health-related behaviors in diverse cultural contexts.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section explores the impact of COVID-19 on adopting holistic health practices among young adult women (YAW) in the Arabian Gulf. The analysis begins by defining holistic health and its core principles and examining how these practices gained prominence during the pandemic. The role of imagination as a cognitive tool for adapting to uncertainty is then discussed, culminating in a reflection on the transformations in health perceptions and lifestyle changes since COVID-19.

What is holistic health?

Holistic health is a biophysical science that integrates nutrition principles and movement-based healing arts, such as exercise, Tai Chi, Qi Gong, reflexology, homoeopathy, meditation, and Yoga. It emphasizes the connection between breathing fresh air and physical movement. When COVID-19 struck - a severe upper respiratory disease largely contracted indoors - the world became increasingly receptive to outdoor Yoga, a global movement already embraced by billions, particularly young women.

The pandemic shifted Yoga practices from indoor studios to outdoor spaces, visibly transforming the experiences of Young Adult Women (YAW) who participated in Yoga classes worldwide. Widely appreciated,

holistic health helped many understand that while humans can survive for months without food and days without water, they cannot survive more than a few minutes without air, highlighting its critical importance. Yoga incorporates this principle, improving immunity against respiratory diseases like COVID-19 by emphasizing deep breathing and fresh air. Consequently, Yoga classes had to move outdoors, away from urban environments with high noise and pollution levels.

Automobile ownership became a crucial enabler for YAW to access these outdoor classes in deserts and beaches. National empowerment initiatives that granted women greater freedoms, including the right to own and drive cars, facilitated their participation in the market and health-focused activities. This newfound mobility empowered women to imagine and pursue better lifestyles, reaching serene locations on the outskirts of cities where air quality was significantly better. Holistic health techniques rest on three fundamental principles:

1. health is innate, and individuals are responsible for their well-being;
2. health combines physical, mental, spiritual, and environmental factors;
3. healing involves treating the whole person, not just addressing symptoms;

In practice, holistic health revolves around two primary elements: nutrition and movement. Unlike plants, which produce energy internally through photosynthesis, humans must obtain nutrients and energy externally. Holistic health emphasizes the importance of balanced food intake and physical activity to maintain well-being

How did Holistic health come up during the review?

Although the idea of holistic health has existed for some time, it was not until COVID-19 that Young Adult Women (YAW) in the Gulf countries adopted it en masse. Their imagination linked holistic health with outdoor Yoga, driven partly by their disillusionment with the persistent side effects of the “pill for

every ill” and partly by the death toll of the pandemic.

One participant shared her experience: “It gave me indigestion,” said a 31-year-old YAW from Lebanon after a beach yoga class in Dubai (April 2023). She added, “COVID-19 was the best thing that happened to me. As you cannot find health in a bottle, COVID-19 motivated me to explore holistic health, which led me to beach Yoga.”

YAWs are increasingly aware that all prescription drugs have side effects. Observing how their parents’ generation suffered, many now believe that drugs are insufficient to cure chronic diseases or combat viral infections effectively. History supports this belief, as past pandemics like the Spanish flu killed more people than World War I, illustrating the devastating impact of viruses.

“Women are more intuitive than men; they anticipate and take preventive measures,” said a 29-year-old YAW of Indian origin, interviewed after a Yoga class. She explained, “I grew up hearing about Yoga in my family but never practiced it until COVID-19 set in. The pandemic took away my freedom and a couple of loved ones, painfully.” She also revealed that she had never been to the Arab world before but, during the lockdown, decided to buy a one-way ticket to Dubai after feeling she had “lost control” of her life.

“It was a silver lining,” she said. The uncertainty of the pandemic made her feel sad but also willed her to take charge of her life and make a move. Arriving in Dubai was a relief, and from then onward, life began to rebuild itself around her. She described the experience as a “lifestyle changer, ” bringing about positive transformation.

Gender is often considered society's soft face. Therefore, it can be assumed that for her, gender empowerment involves fostering peace during times of fear and tension. As holistic health becomes a prominent feature of social life in many Arab countries, it has significantly shaped YAWs' imagination and encouraged them to envision a better future.

What is imagination?

Cognitive science and philosophy suggest the human mind can construct real or imagined experiences. Most people tend to think in one of two ways: standard thinking, which involves perceiving things "as is," and imaginative thinking, which goes beyond the physical to incorporate emotional, environmental, social, psychological, spiritual, transcendental, and economic elements. The latter is often used as a creative tool to visualize desirable outcomes and activate the subconscious to achieve them.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the SARS-CoV-2 virus became a powerful stimulus for imaginative thinking. For many, the virus was mentally visualized as exhaled breath mist spreading invisibly indoors, leading to diminished immunity and potential infection when inhaled by others. This vivid mental image made the risk tangible and drove a shift toward outdoor interactions to avoid exposure.

Standard thinking, by contrast, is rooted in routine and predictability. It involves paying bills, maintaining relationships, and raising a family—actions often require little imagination. Over-reliance on standard thinking can lead to stagnation, slowing personal growth and reducing adaptability. Imaginative thinking, however, is intuitive and spontaneous. It arises in response to adversity, helping individuals overcome fear and navigate challenges by visualizing innovative solutions. The pandemic catalyzed imaginative thinking,

particularly for Young Adult Women (YAW). Many began questioning traditional medical authority and reexamining their lifestyles. COVID-19 acted as a "brain booster," inspiring them to adopt new habits and take transformative life steps. For example, Yoga practitioners, particularly women, embraced imaginative thinking to see the world holistically. They connected the pandemic to physical health, family, social interaction, the environment, and even life's spiritual and transcendental aspects.

In contrast, men were more likely to engage in standard thinking, viewing COVID-19 as an isolated condition disconnected from broader life elements. While women perceived the pandemic as entangled with the environment—bees, birds, weather, and germs—men often fit it into preconceived notions, focusing narrowly on its immediate physical implications. This gendered difference in thinking styles highlights how women were more deductive, drawing on imagination to conserve energy, help others, and guide themselves independently.

This transition from standard to imaginative thinking during the pandemic is illustrated in Figure 1, which contrasts Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus*—symbolizing harmony and balance—with Picasso's *Guernica*—representing complexity, chaos, and transformation.



think of Botticelli's Frescos vs. Picasso's
Cubism: The birth of Venus vs. Guernica

Figure 1. Imagination vs. standard thinking: A visual metaphor for change

Note: compiled by the authors

The shift reflects how the adversity of COVID-19 spurred creativity and holistic understanding, fostering personal and collective growth among YAW. The visual contrast between Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* and Picasso's *Guernica* reflects the shift in thinking brought about by COVID-19. Before the pandemic, the emphasis was on standard thinking—structured, routine, and linear. Afterwards, imagination inspired a more creative, diverse, and holistic perspective, helping many young women, particularly those practicing yoga, to reframe their experiences and find resilience during the lockdown. This contrast symbolizes the transition from static perceptions of life to a dynamic, interconnected view encompassing emotional, social, and environmental dimensions.

This means that while before COVID, the emphasis was on standard thinking, after COVID, the focus was more on creative, diverse, and holistic ways of thinking, with the help of the imagination, a tendency to see things more holistically. Imagination and thoughts about holistic health helped many Yoga girls view their helplessness during the lockdown in a new way.

What is that way, and what changed since Covid-19?

Many Yoga practitioners interviewed reflected on their challenges and obstacles during the pandemic and the accompanying restrictive measures. They spoke candidly about the mental anguish caused by COVID-19, including the loss of income and the strain on their well-being. The pandemic undoubtedly had a profound impact on their thinking.

However, amidst the adversity, there emerged a silver lining. The forced introspection and stimulation of imagination prompted by the pandemic led many to reevaluate deeply held beliefs. For instance, they questioned the assumption that working hard and constantly pursuing external

achievements would bring happiness. Instead, they concluded that happiness begins internally—with self-acceptance, pursuing activities that inspire, and finding intrinsic motivation. This shift in perspective significantly influenced their imagination and outlook on life.

Indeed, much has changed since COVID-19. The environment was one of the primary beneficiaries of the global slowdown. During the pandemic, animal populations began to recover, floods abated, radiation levels decreased, CO2 emissions were significantly reduced, vegetation flourished, methane levels declined, plastic waste diminished, and human traces in many ecosystems faded. These changes underscored humanity's impact on the planet and provided a glimpse of what could be achieved through conscious effort.

The human organism, too, experienced positive transformations. YAW became more imaginative, creative, and introspective. They also developed greater confidence in expressing their thoughts and feelings about social life. Below are some notable gender-related developments that emerged from these conversations.

1. Be your health advocate and ask questions about everything: too much of a good thing can be bad

"COVID-19 policy was slightly mixed up with the Middle Ages," remarked a Yoga practitioner with a PhD in biology. "It was a bit too much for me. Too much of a good thing is bad." This sentiment reflects the challenges of navigating the pandemic's excessive measures. As life now resembles an open highway with seemingly endless options, she emphasized the importance of being one's health advocate: "No one better than you can take care of you."

Science supports the idea that health can regenerate with behavioral changes, challenging societal norms that suggest individuals should succumb to illness or decrepitude by the age of 50 or 60 and pass away by 70 or 80. Older, healthier individuals are also shown to have a lower carbon

footprint, as they tend to have fewer vices and a deeper appreciation for nature, making less of an impact on the planet than younger generations.

Young Adult Women (YAW) advocate for social policies that focus on increasing life spans and enhancing health spans. They argue that living a healthy old age benefits both individuals and the planet, and society should work toward this goal.

2. *Marriage can be a disadvantage for women. Depends!*

Many Yoga practitioners expressed nuanced views on marriage, with some noting its disadvantages for women. "Women become prettier after divorce," one remarked, emphasizing how commitment to relationships and children often leaves little time for self-care or personal growth. This idea aligns with a broader pattern of thought stimulated by COVID-19: the "beauty theory of singlehood," which highlights how freedoms post-divorce can limit emotional and physical health problems.

After separation, many YAWs began questioning the practical realities of marriage. "*Does marriage ruin women?*" was a recurring theme. Several explained that marriage often involves a domineering partner who imposes control due to a fear of abandonment. This dynamic can lead to personality conflicts and eventually push women (and some men) toward divorce. For many women, the resulting liberation improved their health and decision-making capacity. One YAW summarized her experience succinctly: "Why did I ever get married?"

While common in the West, Prenuptial agreements are less prevalent in the Gulf region. One YAW noted that she would never split assets acquired during her marriage as part of a divorce settlement, reflecting cultural differences in attitudes toward financial independence and marital contracts.

How does (Western) social policy explain the above?

Western social policies, while designed to address gender inequalities, often fall short in practice. Research shows these policies only partially mitigate social divisions between men and women and sometimes inadvertently reinforce them. Divorce, in contrast, can reverse these dynamics by liberating women from relationships where they feel burdened by "adult men behaving like children." One YAW observed, "COVID-19 proved this point. A man with a paid job is safe during a pandemic, but not a dependent married woman with children."

The situation is slightly better for women with paid employment, whether in formal or informal care work, as they retain a sense of individuality beyond their roles as mothers. However, the pandemic exposed significant gaps in social policies that fail to account for women's future needs. Social insurance and housing protection rules, for instance, were found to discriminate against women, particularly elderly women, leaving many outside the protection system during and after the lockdown.

Marriage and motherhood bring unique challenges for women, including pregnancy, weight gain, menopause, and hormonal changes, all of which impact their quality of life. "Do you want to take her?" joked a 30-year-old YAW from Italy, referring to her difficult 2-year-old daughter. "In my next life, I want to return as a man and never have to care for a child again."

Another YAW, a 31-year-old from Ukraine, shared how she moved to Dubai to seek paid work after her home and shop in Kyiv were destroyed while she cared for her mother and daughter. Despite their differing circumstances, many YAWs agreed that social protections often overlook the specific needs of women, especially elderly women. The COVID-19 lockdown exposed these gaps, leaving many women without adequate support during a period of heightened vulnerability.

3. *"If you can't put up, shut up."*

Arab YAW, like their sisters from Europe and Asia, said young women are reshaping

their mental beliefs about social life because now they realize men cannot do everything for them as they claim before marriage. Thus, she must learn to be more practical by becoming financially independent from males, whether her father or husband.

This means social policy can help expand market opportunities for YAWs today by focusing on increasing income options with skills and opportunities that pay now and, in the future, irrespective of the marital situation, and lead them to learn more about their personal health needs in the future and physiology.

4. *Helping minorities as a belief*

Yoga girls were more transcendental. They felt society must help all minorities improve their quality of life, regardless of color, creed, or background. The first step towards this was to talk positively about minorities, and they were helping by organizing free and inclusive social events, like beach yoga and fashion shows.

5. *More satisfaction with sleep*

Several YAWs said they used to take sleeping pills and other medication to improve sleep quality and developed a dependency. However, since COVID-19, thanks to the new Government's gender policy, she bought a car and joined a Yoga and meditation class in the desert near Jeddah.

As a result, her sleep improved and became less distorted. Soon after, she kicked that habit, which reinforced the importance of movement in her imagination. "Now," she said, "I can sleep like a young adult should, heavy, so I move my body every 30 minutes when I am awake." Her dreams also became less memorable (i.e., less bizarre).

Indeed, for many YAWs between the ages of 21 and 31, women in the Gulf countries today have more opportunities to depend on themselves if they wish. This releases men from the many burdens of support and dangers of over-dependency, which, according to the data, is a desirable development because it helps keep families together.

6. *Yoga helps increase awareness of rights and responsibilities*

The above option puts Arab YAWs in an "envious position," a young woman from Croatia said, commenting on the many life options Arab Gulf women have in their countries. Although the COVID policy was slightly mixed up with what happened in Europe during the Middle Ages, she explained that the UAE successfully sorted out the social life of its people, especially young women.

"In the West, women have to work and raise children." By contrast, "in Arabia, women can choose one over the other or both. They are no longer caught between the two like in the West. It is really up to them," she added. Thus, yoga classes helped YAWs enjoy their rights and increased their awareness of the importance of movement. The freedom to do so seems to have enabled a healthy reassessment of gender roles.

The combination of policy, infection worry, and traditional social pressures has undoubtedly played a critical role in this reassessment and, subsequently, transformed women's lives for the better in the Arabian Gulf, essentially changing their lives to what they prefer for themselves without undue external influence.

7. *City life is nice, but the pressure can be overwhelming*

What happens to the mind and body is a private show, and with the freedom to choose, to be outdoors and breathe clean air, for instance, mental health improved. Yoga practice outdoors releases neurotransmitters that help not only with sleep but also thinking and mood. Many said they can now see and analyze what is inside their lifestyle traps. Many became more forgiving; one even said that she now makes her bed (instead of leaving it to the maid) and listens to the music she likes.

8. *Expand the cultural horizon*

"You are more interested in trying old and new remedies from other cultures," one Yoga practitioner noted, referring to treatments like boiled herbs, beach Yoga, and desert mountain

meditation—practices previously unimagined from the depths of personal knowledge. COVID-19 motivated many to explore alternative treatments, breathing new life into Yoga across the region, from Egypt and Saudi Arabia to Oman and Iran.

Although Yoga has ancient roots in India, its widely recognized health benefits have reached a global audience. Young adults increasingly imagine Yoga as a potential defense mechanism against COVID-19 infection and chronic diseases, integrating it into their lives as part of a broader approach to holistic health.

The revival of beach Yoga and outdoor sports as a health remedy appears to be a milestone toward the road to gender changes along with gender empowerment policy, with characteristic liberal-mindedness expanding and transforming the role of women in society into what they prefer for themselves, now that their market participation rates have risen significantly since the pandemic (to 34.5% in the first quarter of 2023 in Saudi Arabia).

9. *Better ability to cope with stress*

Stress triggers the release of cortisol into the bloodstream, but spending time at the beach serves as a natural antidote, Yoga practitioners observed. “And if you practice beach Yoga, you will likely become addicted to it,” one noted, “because of the numerous mental and physical health benefits you’ll experience.”

Beach yoga proved to be a fascinating therapy that not only prevents COVID-19 infection but also helps heal it once contracted and cure its symptoms, like fatigue and morning headaches. By the beach, the air is full of salts that can also treat many other health issues and help calm the person down. The closer the person is to the water, the better. The color blue of the sea is also therapeutic, as many YAWs have found out by practice. Many

lost weight by just meditating and doing yoga next to the water before sunset. The sea breath and the setting sun combine with the salts in the air, and the spaciousness and semi-secluded white sands with ease of access come together to deliver a “hospital of wonders” to personal health for free.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Based on personal conversations in three Gulf countries, this paper found that the image of uncertainty was persistent in the minds of many young adult women in the Gulf during the lockdown years – 2020 to 2022.

COVID-19 changed their minds' picture of health and well-being from the hospital to holistic health. The awareness of its global dimension triggered a different imagination of life together, an imagination of lifestyle standards that differed from the established social structure and the traditional model of the family with its wide range of functions, like regulating sexual activity, protecting economic survival during hard times, and preparing children for the future by making clear their rights and responsibilities.

Mindful of their health vulnerability and not wanting to be exploited by the medical system, what happened to YAWs during lockdown was essentially a reassessment of the currency of these given rights and expected responsibilities by society. So strong was this feeling that some became depressed, living in a catatonic state of hibernation to expend the least amount of energy needed to sustain life while self-pitying themselves. By contrast, young women with strong wills and extroverted personalities told themselves they were powerful enough to outlive COVID-19 and experience all that life offers. Yoga was just the beginning of change.

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