

Competence of people conducting yoga classes in Poland – analysis based of websites information

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Abstract

Background & Study Aim: It is assessed that in Poland about 40-50 thousand people do yoga regularly and over one thousand yoga instructors are needed to satisfy the demand. The aim of this study was the knowledge about competence of yoga teachers in Poland providing open yoga classes. The specific goal is the answer to the questions: Who are the teachers of yoga? What are their education, experience and qualifications to carry out such activities? **Material & Methods:** Our analysis was based of websites information included 175 centres who specialize in yoga classes. The number of yoga teachers and instructors analysed in the study was 463, women (n=323) and men (n=140). Their age range was between 20 and 60 years.

Results: Compared to 2005, the number of schools increased from 56 to 175. Most centres were in the big cities, such as Warsaw, Krakow and Wroclaw and majority of the yoga instructors were women. Majority of leaders were from sport sciences field mostly physiotherapists and recreation instructors. Professional competencies of people conducting yoga classes in Poland is given more frequently than in the study carried out in 2005. In this study (2012) 50% of people conducting yoga classes write about specialized competences. It is progress to compare with only 40% seven years ago.

Conclusions: By comparing data from two studies suggest that yoga in Poland is growing fast. Also the people running yoga classes are more competent and better prepared to conduct classes.

Key words: yoga teacher • yoga instructor • yoga school

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INTRODUCTION

It is assessed that in Poland about 40-50 thousand people do yoga regularly and over one thousand yoga instructors are needed to satisfy the demand. Owing to the increasing interest in yoga, new specialized studios are being opened. They offer a wide variety of yoga programs addressed to different groups. In the post-war period, the development of open yoga classes accessible to all interested people had two principal periods. In the development of yoga in Western countries [1, 2]. De Michelis [3] finds three

phases: popularization, consolidation and acculturation. Whereas in Poland only (popularization and consolidation), an be differentiated and the movement progressed far more slowly than in Western countries.

In Poland the second phase (consolidation) started in the mid-1980s, when finally it was possible to attend training centres in India and in the Western countries. That was also the beginning of the consolidation of many actions whose aim was to teach yoga. In

Yoga class – a group of students attending a specific yoga practices in a structured period of time (usually 90 minutes). In the West, yoga is usually associated with physical exercises or asanas (postures).

Yoga teacher – someone who obtain specified professional qualifications or credentials from recognized yoga schools. In Poland professional teaching qualifications may include the study of pedagogy, the science of teaching.

Yoga Instructor – a teacher who ranks below a yoga teacher, teaching assistant specializing in yoga subject and involves some specific skills.

The leader – may or may not have any formal authority, but somebody whom people follow and who guides or directs others because certain quality of an individual personality.

Yoga School – an institution or place for the teaching students under the direction of yoga teachers, instructors or leaders.

Iyengar Yoga School – a system of yoga that B.K.S. Iyengar developed from traditional hatha yoga postural techniques and popularized in the early 1950s.

Hatha Yoga – a kind of yoga focusing on purification procedures and physical strength using exercises and postures (asanas).

Ashtanga Yoga – a system of yoga founded and popularized by K. Pattabhi Jois in the 1930s and which is promoted as a type of vigorous yoga exercise.

Sivananda Yoga – a system of yoga developed by Swami Sivananda in the 1930s as a form of hatha yoga in which the training focuses on preserving the health and wellness.

VinyasaKrama Yoga – a system of yoga developed by Krishnamacharya in the 1930s concentrating on individualized approached sequential movement and breathing that interlinks postures.

Kundalini Yoga – a holistic system of yoga developed by Harbhajan Singh known as Yogi Bhajan in the 1960s by “and his “Healthy, Happy, Holy Organization (3HO)” established 1969.

Mantra Yoga – a method of working with the wandering mind by repetition and chanting of some special words and sounds (mantras), this kind of practice completely engages the mind.

this period various yoga studios and groups of instructors and teachers were formed. In the 1990s, when the radical political and economic transformations took place, not only books on yoga were widely published but also it was possible to broaden one's competence in yoga exercise training. It is also the time when the first yoga studios offering an extended program were opened. The first visiting instructors and teachers are invited to lead yoga classes in studios. At the same time apart from a growing number of yoga studios, various organizations, associations and educational initiatives of regular teacher training were established. In the last decade, after the year 2000 there has been a rapid growth in the number of yoga studios, and consequently active instructors and teachers conducting yoga classes [4].

The first profile of people conducting yoga classes in Poland. It was developed by Kulmatycki and Burzyński in 2005 [5]. The current study is a continuation of the one carried out 7 and 15 years ago [5, 6].

The aim of this study was the knowledge about competence of yoga teachers in Poland providing open yoga classes. The specific goal is the answer to the questions: In which cities is most yoga schools or studios? Who are the teachers of yoga? What are their education, experience and qualifications to carry out such activities?

MATERIAL AND METHODS

In order to determine profiles of people conducting yoga classes, like it was done in the previous study in 2005, data was collected through websites. The data was collected between Aug. 08, 2012 and Sep. 19, 2012 in two ways: through *joga-joga.pl* website and through *google* search engine in searching of yoga studios in a given town, e.g. ‘yoga studios in Lublin’ and then entering the studios’ websites. In addition, some data from smaller towns were supplemented in the period from Dec. 08, 2012 to Jan. 19, 2013, mostly using *joga-joga.pl* portal. Only the websites that offered yoga classes were included in our analysis. Whereas websites which were only indirectly connected with yoga exercises having their main activity directed to other practices, such as meditation or bodywork were excluded.

Methodological dilemmas

The authors had to face a dilemma how to classify numerous proposals offered by the portal which were not really strictly associated with yoga, for example, fitness clubs, beauty centres, spa centers, wellness

hotels or simply shops selling cosmetics, but which also offered yoga classes. Another methodological problem was to identify a studio with the surname of the only or lead instructor; in numerous cases such a person worked for more than one studio. It happened quite often that the provided links were not active. While collecting data another important problem occurred: various terms used in websites to define a person who conducts yoga classes, sometimes he or she is called ‘instructor’, sometimes ‘teacher’, other times ‘leader’.

Terminology

The terminology is adopted on the basis of one's experience, knowledge and skills which are confirmed by recognized environment of a given domain. In this paper people who lead classes in yoga studios are always called ‘a person conducting yoga classes’. Whereas those who taught them are called ‘teachers’. There is also the third level which refers to those who teachers estimate and consider recognized authorities; they are called ‘masters’. Masters are defined as ‘guru’ in Indian culture and they usually originate from a particular school and culture. In some yoga studios which were founded in cultural conditions different from the Indian ones, this division has its significance though highly limited and rather symbolic. The term used in this paper, i.e. ‘a person conducting’ results from two premises. On the one hand it has to make order in the hierarchy system which is so important in acquiring yoga, this specific kind of art of life, and on the other hand this kind of simplification is supposed to facilitate analysis of the competencies of people conducting yoga classes without attributing to them evaluating features which are implied in certain titles used in various types or traditions of yoga.

DATA ANALYSIS

Analysis took into consideration the following data about yoga studios and persons conducting yoga classes, which were divided into: general information and competence data.

General information:

- number of people conducting yoga classes in each school, divided by gender,
- location (town),
- data about the number of studios divided by websites - *joga.joga.pl* or an independent portal.

Competence data:

- professional specialization of people conducting yoga classes,

- years of experience as a person interested in yoga,
- teachers used as reference points named by people conducting yoga classes,
- these people' yoga qualifications (certificates).

We assumed that the most interesting in the analysis of competence of people conducting yoga classes are: a) education and profession, b) work experience, c) yoga specialization qualifications. Therefore, analysis of the three aforementioned information groups about people conducting yoga classes occupy most part of the research part of the paper.

Material

Analysis included 175 yoga studios (7 years ago there were 56 available studios) found on the *joga.joga.pl* portal; the same procedure was used in 2005 [6]. However, the total number of studios placed on the portal was 288, but only 128 websites were really active. Out of the remaining 124 which were on the list but whose websites were not accessible it was possible to spot 51 studios looking for them in other websites using 'yoga studios' as key words. It is true that the word 'studio' is not very precise, it often refers to classes with only one teacher or few classes. In addition, the nationwide portal does not present all initiatives of the kind. For example, in Wrocław more studios were found using the key words 'yoga studios' than through the specialized *joga.joga.pl* portal. Also yoga studios in Poznań were not placed on *joga.joga.pl* in the majority of cases.

The number of yoga class leaders analysed in the study was 463; women (n=323) outnumbered men (n=140) more than 2 to 1. As few as 15 yoga teachers provided the information about their age; their age range was between 20 and 60 years.

RESULTS

The highest number of studios are in big cities. Traditionally, Warszawa in on the top of the list, followed by Krakow, the joint third place is occupied by Wrocław, Poznań and Łódź. Whereas Gdansk, Katowice, Szczecin and Lublin place themselves in rank successively with more than ten schools in each town. In other towns there are few studios or just one.

Professional competence of people conducting yoga classes in Poland

In the present study most people answering the question about education or profession indicated they were, first of all, physiotherapists, followed by instructors of movement recreation, etc. (n=38). Another group is composed of graduates of university schools of physical education (n=20), followed by graduates in languages and literature (n=18), psychologists (n=17), graduates of art schools (n=14), economists (n=13) and pedagogy graduates (n=11) (Fig.1). In many cases the professions given by people conducting yoga classes were more than one, as they managed to acquire a few different specializations. Quite a large number of teachers have a few majors and professions, e.g. graduate in philosophy and pedagogy who is also a movement recreation instructor (Fig.1).

Analysis shows that people who practice yoga for at least 5 years are the most numerous (n=74), followed by those who practice yoga for over 10 years (n=61), which implies that they got interested in yoga exercises in the last decade. These two groups constitute two thirds of all the people conducting yoga classes (Fig. 2).

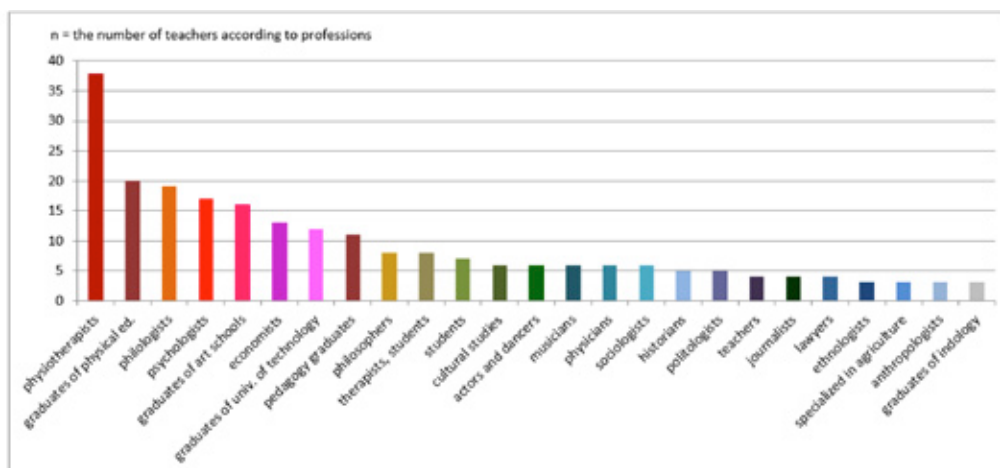


Figure 1. Professions and (under) graduate specializations declared by people conducting yoga classes

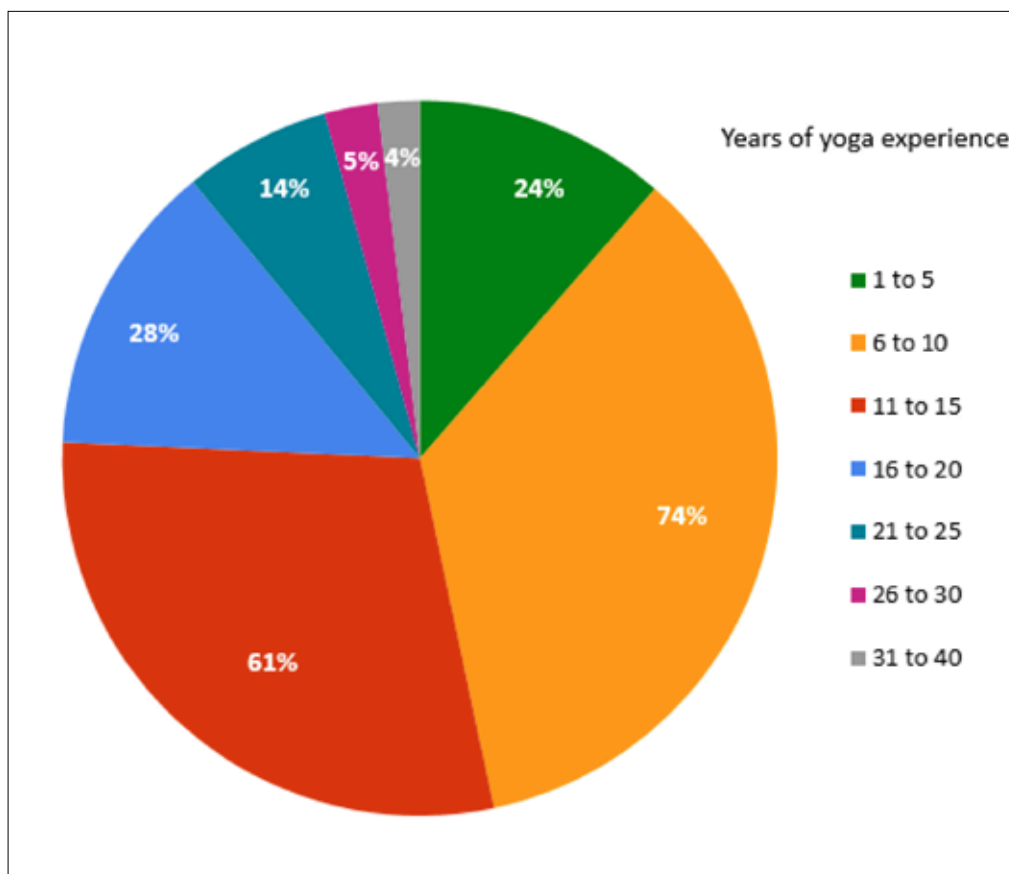


Figure 2. Years of yoga experience declared by people conducting yoga classes on websites

As many as 247 out of 463 people conducting yoga classes did not give any information about their yoga competencies. Quite a numerous group provided names of many teachers. Only 216 people conducting yoga classes provided information about their yoga qualifications on their websites. The vast majority did not provide any information about their competencies. The largest group of people conducting yoga classes mentioned certificates obtained in Iyengar Yoga School. People following this tradition were 124. Other people conducting yoga classes mentioned: *Hatha Yoga* (n=27), *Ashtanga Yoga* (n=17), *Sivananda Yoga* (n=9), *VinyasaKrama Yoga* (n=6), *Kundalini Yoga* (n=5), *Mantra Yoga* (n=3). Twenty-five people conducting yoga classes indicated less known schools; they were mostly single indications of certain teachers or courses open to the wide public (Fig. 3).

In the group that leads yoga classes according to Iyengar tradition, the most representative tradition, decidedly most numerous group included people with “Introductory II” degree (n=42), followed by: certified (n=18), Intermediate Junior I (n=12), Intermediate Junior II (n=12), certified at the Ramamani Iyengar

Memorial Yoga Institute (RYMYI) in Pune, India (n=12), with “Introductory I” degree (n=17).

DISCUSSION

Popularity of yoga classes is mostly due to health benefits associated with yoga. On the one hand, yoga classes are treated as preventive treatment and enhancement of health potentials, and on the other hand, as a means in coping with already occurring symptoms of discomfort or tension related to the lifestyle or work requirements [7-9]. Analysis shows that there is a tendency to address yoga classes to specific target groups defined in terms of age, experience level and specific needs[10-12]. Popularity of yoga classes for elderly people, pregnant women and people with back pain tends to increase steadily. Based on their experience the authors can state that in most cases during yoga classes people are given some technical explanation how to do a given exercise or are shown how to perform some breathing and hygienic practices. Sometimes it happens that the person conducting yoga classes should cope with some complex psychological and life dilemmas of yoga class

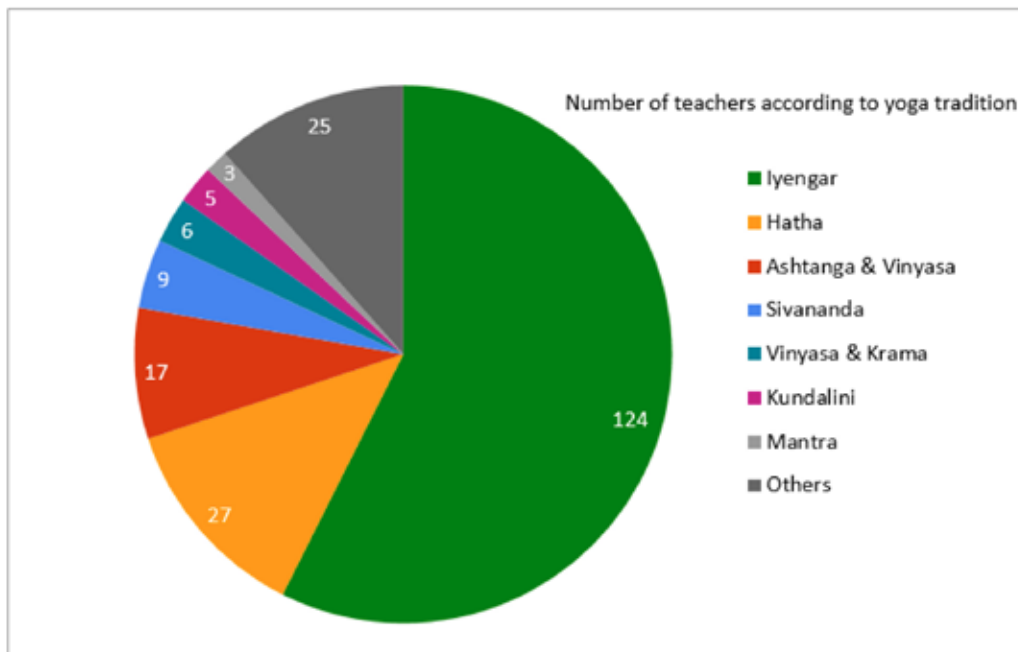


Figure 3. Qualifications/certificates of people conducting yoga classes in respect to the given school or tradition

participants [13]. Often people who take up yoga classes expect some suggestions that are not limited to class situations, but need to know what and how to do in their lives [14-16]. It means that in contrast to goes to other classes of physical exercises, yoga class participants' expectations are more complex. It is important for people conducting yoga classes to know, basing on their knowledge and experience, how to wisely advise and suggest a well selected set of practices, but also to be able to understand themselves and explain to others the multidimensional and multilevel character of yoga exercise effect on human organism. It happens quite often that a yoga class participant is interested in 'yoga in a nutshell', i.e. specific exercise to cure a given problem. Therefore, yoga studios which want to respond to this request, and consequently be more attractive to customers and more competitive on the market, often offer a service without providing professional competence. It is essential to note that yoga, being a complex philosophical and pedagogical system, is a multidisciplinary science [17,18]. That is why people conducting yoga classes or yoga teachers are required to have a wider insight of themselves, their students and the world. Due to that, educational preparation of people conducting yoga classes, instructors and teachers should be as comprehensive as possible. It is obvious that in each sphere where one person influences another, quality criteria of this impact should be defined. On the one hand, such criteria should regard the basic principles of relation

between the instructor or teacher and the student, e.g. the person conducting yoga classes should be able to communicate orally, have persuasive abilities. On the other hand, specific abilities of teaching methods are fundamental. In the case of such complex subject as yoga, teaching staff are required to be very precise in relaying to others successive steps of coping with various new exercises, which can be done accurately only if the staff have enough own experience. According to the offered range of yoga, its intensity, insight complexity, people conducting yoga classes need to have appropriate qualifications [19]. In addition, they must have security qualifications, e.g. to ensure the safety of a numerous group crammed in a small gym or to introduce gradually increasing levels of difficulty of successive phases of physical postures. This demands a lot of experience, which one acquires with time, and real knowledge about the human organism and how it functions. Therefore, it seems obvious that people conducting yoga classes, on the one hand, should gain knowledge concerning basic human biology (anatomy, physiology, biomechanics, etc.), on the other hand, should have a wide humanistic knowledge of art of living based on philosophy, ethics, pedagogy or psychology. It is neither simple nor possible to achieve in short time.

Analysis of what yoga studios offer in their websites demonstrates that in Poland there is a strong tendency to prefer recreation and health directed

exercises modelled on hatha yoga techniques, i.e. certain exercises of physical yoga. Similar findings were obtained a few years ago [5,6,19]. Whereas from the study carried out on Wrocław students results that young people attending yoga classes are mostly looking for 'something new'. Thus most of yoga classes have an introductory character, which usually regards the body, its fitness and flexibility. It is true that yoga class goers appreciate the cognitive aspect, which means that they are open-minded and interested in trying new experiences, but at the end they usually limit to acquire successive exercises and body positions. At this stage physical exercises called *asan* are most popular and broadly used. Whereas other practices are used far less frequently, e.g. breathing exercises (*pranayama*) or exercises withdrawing awareness from the outside stimuli (*pratyahara*) or concentration exercises (*dharana*) or meditation exercises (*dhyana*). In order to have a possibility of experiencing more subtle yoga practices, it is essential to show strong determination to continue. This is really hard to achieve in the studios whose goal is to find more new customers.

This research allows us to answer the main question; Who are people conducting yoga classes in Poland? We can describe the profile of people conducting yoga classes in Poland, but still many supportive questions remain unanswered. Even the terminology itself, i.e. what to call 'the one who teaches yoga practices', creates problems. With time, we are sure, such proper terms will be coined for people conducting yoga classes, yoga instructors and teachers, but for the time being there is chaos. The current latitude in using different terms may result from several reasons. On the one hand, it is due to the environment of those who lead yoga classes who are reluctant to undergo any kind of verification and to adapt to, e.g. accepted terms used in physical culture sciences or general education. Rejecting conventional rules is also convenient because if they were accepted, people conducting yoga classes would have to supplement their qualifications according to required standards, e.g. in recreation or rehabilitation area. Nonetheless, there are associations linked to international nets or societies which are obliged to strictly observe the terms used to define each stage confirmed by an obtained certificate. Another reason is a purely marketing technique whose aim is to make some yoga studios more credible and reliable. The most controversial is obviously the term 'teacher'. On the one hand, some people conducting yoga classes call themselves 'teachers' though they only have participated in single workshops or courses. On the other hand, a 'teacher' is

somebody who has been leading yoga classes for 30 years and has professional education. Some people conducting yoga classes give a very imprecise information referring to some well-known names, e.g. 'I have learned from Kocot, Jagucki', who are recognized and popular yoga teachers, but in fact such information does not mean anything.

On the basis of the collected data we present the profile of the person conducting yoga classes in Poland in the year 2012 (Tab. 1).

Table 1. The data used to create the competence profile of the person conducting yoga classes in Poland in the years 2005 and 2012

#	Competence data of yoga class leaders in Poland	2005	2012
1	Number of yoga studios available on joga.joga.pl	56	175
2	Number of people conducting yoga classes	135	463
3	Percentage of women	56 %	70 %
4	Mean age of people conducting yoga classes	30-40 years	40-45 years
5	Mean experience of people conducting yoga classes	5-10 years	10-15 years
6	Available information on education or profession	30 %	60 %
7	Prevailing specialization in education	Graduates of AWF (University of Physical Education), psychology, pedagogy	physiotherapists, recreation instructors, AWF (University of Physical Education) graduates
8	In possession of qualifications/certificate to lead yoga classes	50 %	60 %

The most numerous group is composed of people with over 5-year experience (n=74) followed by people who slightly exceed 10 years of experience (n=61). It means that their interest in yoga exercises started in the last decade. Nearly two thirds of all people conducting yoga classes did not provide this information in their websites. The information of their age was given only by 15 people (20-60 years). On the basis of the years of experience in leading classes it is possible to presume that the mean age slightly increased in comparison with the year 2005 (30-40 years), and may be estimated around 40-45 years in 2012.

Data collecting about yoga studios was possible owing to publicly available information provided in websites.

Due to websites one can have a look at what studios offer and collect information about people who conduct yoga classes. Nevertheless there are a lot of doubts about the quality and reliability of the provided information, as often it is very superficial and does not reflect the complexity of the phenomenon of yoga studios in Poland. Like in the study of 2005 due to impossibility of reaching the studios which do not have websites, numerous schools have been omitted [5]. In spite of that, the presented profile of people conducting yoga classes in Poland due to the sample size entitles us to draw more general conclusions.

CONCLUSIONS

Being aware of imperfectness of the study, the authors consider this article as a successive step further to thorough studies on the issues of the adaptation of the

Indian yoga system in Poland. An attempt to identify which tradition is followed by people conducting yoga classes in Poland was not simple, because a quite large group of leaders did not refer to any yoga tradition or type. A group of 167 persons out of 463 mentioned various teachers as sources of their knowledge.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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