

More than a feeling: Perceptions of wellbeing in regular Ashtanga Yoga practitioners

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Abstract: As the understanding of subjective wellbeing within different populations continues to evolve, it is necessary to ensure the perspectives of people with diverse worldviews are included. This mixed methods study focuses specifically on 166 regular Ashtanga Yoga practitioners (AYPs), exploring participants' perceptions of subjective wellbeing. Definitions were analysed using word count analysis and Reflexive Thematic Analysis, which yielded four overarching themes about the nature of wellbeing. The *multidimensional nature* included emotional, psychological, physical, spiritual, social, and ethical elements. The *holistic nature* highlighted integration, balance, and stability across wellbeing dimensions. The *non-dualistic nature* represented wellbeing comprised of seemingly dichotomous concepts (e.g., agency/receptiveness). The *dynamic nature* included change and embodied moment-to-moment experiences. Yoga may provide corporal and mental abilities resulting in the specific themes that emerged within participants' responses. AYPs' conceptualisations of wellbeing provide an avenue to explore embodied wellbeing, with implications in ways of knowing about and cultivating wellbeing in a way that directly incorporates mind, body, and spiritual interconnections.

Keywords: Ashtanga Yoga; wellbeing; reflexive thematic analysis; holistic wellbeing; mind-body

1. Introduction

Positive psychology as a discipline has advanced the conceptualisation, measurement, and cultivation of wellbeing (Kern et al., 2020). Over the past three decades, an array of theoretical frameworks and models have been proposed, conceptualising subjective wellbeing as a multidimensional construct, including emotional, cognitive, psychological, social, physical, and spiritual dimensions (Chia et al., 2020; Friedman & Kern, 2014). Although not necessarily an absolute truth, the various models, with related measures and interventions, have been incorporated into a range of programs, curricula, and other practical applications (Cooke et al., 2016; Kern et al., 2020).

However, the conceptualisations and measures themselves bring several often-unacknowledged biases and implications. For example, wellbeing within different populations depends on which conceptual framework is used (e.g., Black & Kern, 2020; Hone et al., 2014; Joshanloo, 2013); lay people's definitions do not always match scholarly definitions of wellbeing (e.g., Hone et al., 2015); and different populations perceive wellbeing in different ways (e.g., Bharara et al., 2019; Black & Kern, 2020; Huang et al., 2020). This points to the need for studies within specific populations, identifying what wellbeing means and how it is experienced by

different groups of people within their natural contexts, as well as reflecting on the implications of choosing particular models and measurements that may or may not align with these conceptualisations. The use of alternative research designs and methods to study wellbeing within groups holding alternate worldviews provides opportunities to incorporate more inclusive definitions of optimal functioning into wellbeing research and practice (Kern et al., 2020).

In this article, we focus on the perceptions of one specific population: regular Ashtanga Yoga Practitioners (AYPs). We first consider some of the existing models and frameworks of wellbeing, stressing limitations of existing approaches commonly used within positive psychology and the value of incorporating alternative approaches to broaden and deepen our understanding of wellbeing as a construct. Second, we briefly review yoga as a practice and a worldview, arguing for its potential to provide relevant insights into conceptualisations of wellbeing. While there are many forms of yoga, we focus specifically on Ashtanga Yoga (AY), which is a systematic method that encourages a regular practice and can potentially influence practitioners' views and experiences of wellbeing. Third, drawing upon qualitative data from 166 regular AY practitioners, we analyse practitioners' perceptions of wellbeing. Finally, we discuss implications, limitations, and potential future directions for research and practice.

1.1 Expanding conceptualisations of wellbeing

With some exceptions (e.g., Wong, 2013), scholars and practitioners within the positive psychology arena have been driven by several often-unacknowledged epistemological assumptions, including methods that are reductionistic in nature, viewing human nature from a deterministic lens, with a tendency toward making universal claims, and a bias toward quantitative data (Kern et al., 2020; Waterman 2013). Nomothetic approaches have been widely used in the social sciences to explore and examine common characteristics, experiences, and phenomena across people, with the aim of identifying commonalities in human existence (Lomas et al., 2020; Nafstad, 2015). While this has enabled positive psychology to advance the study and betterment of happiness and optimal functioning, it offers limited opportunities to understand the particularities of wellbeing within specific groups, populations, and cultures (Lomas, 2015).

In contrast, ideographic approaches view people as unique individuals, valuing subjective experiences, diversity, and culture (Nafstad, 2015; Wong, 2013). They often align with qualitative methods, allowing the researcher to comprehend the individual as a whole and in interaction with their immediate and broader social, cultural, and environmental context (Waterman, 2013). Lomas et al. (2020) proposed that positive psychology is expanding and shifting its focus from an individualistic, agentic, and Westernised view of human functioning and wellbeing, towards a more inclusive, diverse, and cross-cultural approach. This shift involves moving from positivist and post-positivist methodological approaches to other epistemologies, including constructivist and phenomenological perspectives. Qualitative and mixed-methods research designs can contribute to deepening and broadening the understanding of subtleties and complexities of optimal human functioning (Hefferon et al., 2017; Kern et al., 2020; Lomas et al., 2020), allowing researchers to draw on the strengths of each (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

Examining non-Western worldviews at an epistemological level can aid in expanding the knowledge about how wellbeing is defined, measured, and cultivated in a manner that values diverse perspectives (Kern et al., 2020; Lomas et al., 2020). Teramoto-Pedrotti et al. (2012) pointed to the value of both cross-cultural (i.e., across nations) and multicultural (i.e., cultures co-existing within a nation) studies, with a need for greater consideration of the value placed on the work and perspectives of people from diverse, non-Western backgrounds (see also Lomas, 2015). This

means considering how lay people from different age groups, minorities within Western societies, and people with different cultural and ethnical backgrounds define and experience wellbeing (Bharara et al., 2019; Black & Kern, 2020; Bourke & Gelden, 2007; Hone et al., 2015; Huang et al., 2020; Joshanloo, 2014).

1.2 Yoga: An eastern practice in the western world

One population that might offer unique perspectives and insights around wellbeing is regular yoga practitioners. Yoga is an ancient Eastern practice, estimated to have originated thousands of years ago in the Hindu Valley (De-Michelis, 2005). Considered a method that binds mind, body, and soul with the divine, yoga has been traditionally defined as the cessation of mental fluctuations, enabling a more harmonious and balanced lifestyle (Iyengar, 2005). It has been argued that yoga can improve overall health by addressing physical, mental, and spiritual elements through the transformation of the self (Bhavanani, 2016; Riggins, 2013; Salagame, 2011).

Research on yoga has exponentially grown over the past decades (Jeter et al., 2015; Gupta et al., 2018), with an increase in the number of practitioners in Western countries (Birdee et al., 2008; Cramer et al., 2016). The practice of yoga is associated with a range of health benefits (Büssing et al., 2012; Hendricks et al., 2017), with therapeutic benefits for both physical and mental illness (e.g., Cramer et al., 2013; Cramer et al., 2015). A considerable body of research shows its benefits as an intervention, primarily focusing on its physical components such as postures and breath (e.g., Field, 2017; Riggins, 2013; Singleton, 2010). However, fewer studies have considered the practices, experiences, and perspectives of regular practitioners (Field, 2011; Riley & Park, 2015). Philosophical frameworks and resulting methodologies used by contemporary scientific approaches, as well as focusing on yoga as a mainly physical practice, has limited the breadth and depth of yoga research, disregarding its original intention and relevance as a mental and spiritual practice (Salagame, 2011). Exploring yoga as a practice in and of itself, rather than as an intervention, offers opportunities to understand contributions to human functioning and wellbeing that the practice itself offers practitioners.

From a traditional perspective, yoga entails universal moral observances that regulate one's behaviour with others (*yama*), self-discipline and principles by which one lives (*niyama*), the practice of withdrawal and detachment from external objects (*pratyahara*) and a state of higher consciousness achieved when the person becomes one with the object of meditation (*samadhi*) (Iyengar, 2005; Jois, 2016). Combined with physical postures (*asana*), breath techniques (*pranayama*), concentration (*dharana*), and meditation (*dhyana*) (Büssing et al., 2012; Riggins, 2013), these elements conform a philosophical framework known as *The Eight Limbs of Yoga* or *Ashtanga Yoga*, described in the ancient text *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* (Iyengar, 2005). The knowledge and application of these elements through a regular yoga practice may provide an internal frame of reference for practitioners to perceive, experience and function.

1.3 Ashtanga Yoga

AY can be considered as a system equally comprising Patanjali's philosophical eight-fold framework and the practice known as Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga (Jois, 2016; Maehle, 2006). Concretely, AY involves a vigorous physical practice characterised by a continuous and synchronous flow of breath and movement (*vinyasa*), which requires learning and following a series of postures according to each person's needs and expertise, while both concentrating on a particular focal point (*drishti*) and steadying the breath (Jois, 2016; Maehle, 2006; Phillips, 2005). This definition includes several elements of the philosophical framework, such as the physical practice (*asana*), the breathing techniques (*pranayama*), and concentration (*dharana*). The use of a

focal point (*drishti*) and the use of the breath (*pranayama*) not only provide an object to place attention to concentrate (*dharana*), but offer the possibility of withdrawing from the senses (*pratyahara*) (Jois, 2016; Maehle, 2006). Since the *vinyasa* practice is a continuous flow of short-lived postures, it may enable a meditative state (*dhyana*), allowing practitioners to engage in meditation on impermanence (Maehle, 2006). Within the practice, moral observances in relation to others and oneself (i.e., *yamas* and *niyamas*) should be practiced alongside and beyond the physical practice, by applying these behaviours and principles to everyday life (Bhavanani, 2014; Iyengar, 2005; Jois, 2016).

Jois (2016) stressed the importance of understanding each element both on its own and in relation to the others. For example, *yama*, *niyama*, *asana*, and *pranayama* are considered external elements that should be cultivated before developing the others, as their practice would enable the development of the other four internal elements (Jois, 2018; 2016). Ivztan and Papantoniou (2014) contended that elements such as self-discipline, self-awareness, and flow have been studied within wellbeing research, mirroring aspects from *yamas*, *niyamas*, *dharana*, and *pratyahara*. Thus, AY implies conceptualising yoga as an integrative and multi-faceted practice that targets different aspects of wellbeing.

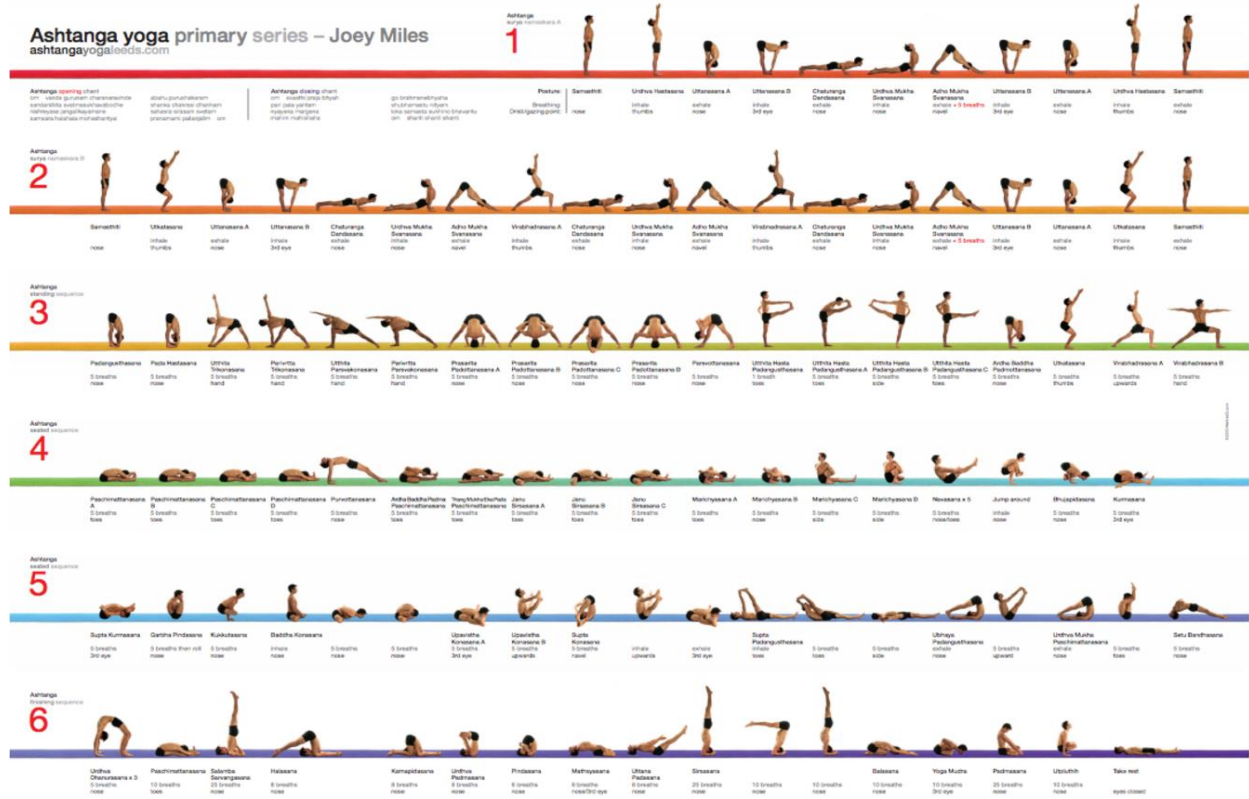
AY is taught in a personalised and progressive manner, for the practitioner to build a self-practice at their own pace, gently building strength, steadiness and health (Jois, 2018). AY is characterised by a one-on-one approach within the context of a group class as taught in Mysore, India (ie., Mysore style class), where each practitioner is practising their own set sequence in their own time. As illustrated in Figure 1, the practice starts with Sun Salutations A and B (ie., *Surya Namaskar*) and continues with a set of standing postures, to then continue with primary series and closing postures. Intermediate and then advanced series follow primary series, with each being learnt once the practitioner has completed the previous series (Swenson, 2007).

Each *asana* is practised with a specific gazing point (*drishti*) and long free breathing with sound (Keen, 2021). The practice of *asana*, *drishti* and breathing simultaneously is known as *trishtana*, meaning three standing places, and is characteristic of the AY method. Another distinctive element is *vinyasa*. Each *asana* has multiple movements, and each movement corresponds with either an inhalation or an exhalation. This synchronisation is called *vinyasa*, and each *asana* comprises a set number of *vinyasas*. For example, *Surya Namaskar A* has nine *vinyasas* (Jois, 2016). *Vinyasas* are traditionally counted in Sanskrit by the teacher, either while teaching each movement and breath for a new *asana*, or when teaching a led class (Maehle, 2006).

Sanskrit-led classes, Mysore style classes, and self-practice typically include chanting of an opening and closing mantra (Jois, 2016; Jois, 2018). Another element that is applied during AY practice is *bandhas*, usually translated as bonding and understood as energy locks, which consist of a combination of muscle engagement and internal bodily awareness (Maehle, 2006). Finally, within the AY system, resting is encouraged once a week, during full and new moon days, and during menstruation for women. Practitioners are encouraged to practice between four and six days a week to experience the benefits from the method (Maehle, 2006).

Figure 1

AY Primary Series Chart. Reprinted from Ashtanga Yoga Leeds, by Joey Miles. Retrieved March 11, 2022 from <https://www.ashtangayogaleeds.com/downloads/ashtanga-primary-series-chart-a4/>. Reprinted with permission.



1.4 The current study

For the current study, the uniform structure of AY provides consistency of the practice and the teaching methods. A limited number of studies have focused specifically on AY. Quantitative studies have examined the effectiveness of the practice regarding physical health outcomes, suggesting it can contribute to cardiorespiratory fitness (Cowen & Adams, 2007), weight control (Benavides & Caballero, 2009), strength (Gruber, 2008; Kim et al., 2012; Mazor et al., 2018), muscular endurance, flexibility, and cardiovascular health (Gruber, 2008). A few dissertations have studied the effects of AY on established practitioners, focusing on the transformative effects that people experience through their yoga practice, using a qualitative approach in very small sample sizes (Acebedo, 2013; Jones, 2019; LaChiusa, 2016; Werner, 2017). Although some studies have aimed at assessing psychological wellbeing, the measurements used reflect a predominantly deficit standpoint, since they mainly evaluated the impact of yoga on depression and anxiety symptoms (e.g., Benavides & Caballero, 2009; Jarry et al., 2017). No studies have been found on wellbeing using an ideographic approach on a large cross-cultural sample of AYPs.

This study aimed to explore the perceptions of regular AYPs in relation to their wellbeing and to determine in which ways AYPs’ perceptions of wellbeing support or differ from existing models of wellbeing. For the purposes of the study, we focus on subjective individual perceptions of wellbeing. Consistent with ideographic approaches and constructivist and phenomenological epistemologies, the wellbeing construct was not defined beforehand. Rather, we sought to understand wellbeing based upon participants’ perspectives and lived experiences. We aligned with a mixed methods paradigm (see Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009) in terms of our philosophical

assumptions and data analytic process, with a greater focus on qualitative elements. Specifically, we were guided by a Social Constructionist paradigm, with both quantitative and qualitative components in the data collection and analysis stages.

2. Method

2.1 Participants

The present study used a subset of respondents from a larger study focused on AY and wellbeing, which included 352 participants from 42 countries, fluent in English and/or Spanish. Participants were recruited online, including invitations on Facebook and Instagram, postings on social media communities related to AY and/or wellbeing, and emailing information about the study directly to yoga studios and teachers, asking them to share the survey with others. The sample represents a convenience sample of willing volunteers who may not generalise across AYPs, but provides unique and important perspectives in and of themselves.

Here we focus on 166 respondents who regarded themselves as regular AYPs and completed the free-response question to define wellbeing. Both included and excluded participants included a range of demographic characteristics (see Supplement 1) and a variety of characteristics of their AY practice (see Supplement 2). All procedures were approved by the University of Melbourne's Human Research Ethics Committee (protocol #1955377.1).

2.2 Measures

Participants completed an online survey either in English or Spanish between April and August 2020. The survey included a mix of quantitative and qualitative questions measuring aspects of their yoga practice, wellbeing, personal traits, health, and demographic information. Drawing upon the collected dataset, the current study includes the questions that addressed respondents' AY practice, engagement with yoga philosophy (see Supplement 3) and demographic information, along with one question that explored their perception of wellbeing (see Supplement 4).

Participants completed a series of closed-ended questions on their AY practice and AY philosophy. Most participants were practising regularly for 1 to 10 years (68.67%) following Mysore style (43.37%) or self-practice (26.51%), and practising between 5 to 6 days a week (59.04%) for 1 to 2 hours (81.33%) per session. The majority were practising primary (46.39%) or intermediate (45.18%) series, and mainly included *vinyasa* (96.99%) and *drishti* (95.78%) in their practice. Most considered yoga philosophy relevant (64.46%) and commonly engaging with readings (83.13%) at least once per week (60.84%) (see Supplements 1-3 for details).

2.3 Data analyses

Participants' responses were recorded using Qualtrics survey software (<https://www.qualtrics.com/au/>) and exported to NVivo (version 12) software for analysis. Responses to open-ended questions exploring AYPs' perceptions of wellbeing were analysed using a sequential mixed-methods approach. We began with a quantitative description of the words that participants used in their definitions. This involved examining the frequency of words used to define wellbeing, creating a word cloud (see Figure 2) and summary tables (see Supplement 5) encapsulating responses. This quantitative component intended to provide an overview and general understanding of the data (Eichstaedt et al., 2021; McNaught & Lam, 2010).

We followed this with an in-depth qualitative exploration using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA; Braun & Clarke, 2012) to systematically identify, organise, and reflect upon patterns of

meaning within the data. RTA acknowledges the relevance of the role of the researcher in bringing and reflecting upon their own set of values, beliefs, interests, and background to enlighten and shape the data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Terry & Hayfield, 2020). We followed the six iterative steps of RTA as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2012; 2021): (1) familiarisation with the data, (2) code generation, (3) construction of potential themes, (4) review of potential themes, (5) definition and naming themes, and (6) generation of a written report. The codes were generated using both a semantic and latent coding approach, meaning that some responses were coded based on the explicit meaning of data, while others were based on the underlying meaning of participants' responses, involving a greater degree of interpretation (Byrne, 2021). Aligned with a constructivist epistemology, we considered meaningfulness of the information as the main guide in the development of codes and themes, using both inductive and deductive approaches (Byrne, 2021).

2.4 Research team and coding process

The authors have backgrounds in psychology and wellbeing, and the lead author has an established AY practice and a yoga teaching certification. Consistent with RTA, data analyses were mainly conducted by the lead author due to expertise with both AY and wellbeing, supported by the other authors. Researcher reflexivity was achieved both independently and in collaboration with the other two authors throughout the process (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Byrne, 2021). While we acknowledge the influence that these backgrounds might have had in the creation of the survey and the interpretation of the results, it also enabled us to use a common language amongst AYPs and within the AY community, and to capture and understand key elements provided by the respondents.

After familiarising with data, a broad range of codes was generated. Codes were grouped into themes that best represented core concepts meaningful across participants. Potential themes were reviewed, and final themes were selected and refined. For instance, "positive relationships" and "high quality connections" were integrated into the sub-theme "harmonious relationships", which sits under the theme "social dimension of wellbeing". The preliminary theme "positive emotions" was divided into the sub-themes "low intensity positive emotions" and "high intensity positive emotions", which are part of the theme "emotional dimension of wellbeing". These themes were then integrated into the overarching theme "the multidimensional nature of wellbeing". Sub-themes were grouped into themes, and themes into overarching themes, based on shared meaning to allow a better comprehension and communication of participants' perspectives. We acknowledge that there are multiple ways to group codes and develop a theme, as this is bounded to the researchers' perspectives (Byrne, 2021).

Although we primarily used inductive and latent approaches to coding to best represent participants' perceptions, we also included deductive and semantic coding. An example of the former is considering the presence of positive emotions as a component of wellbeing. An example of the latter is using terms from responses, such as "physical", "emotional" and "social" for themes composing "the multidimensional nature of wellbeing". Blending these approaches are acknowledged in RTA (Braun & Clarke, 2020; Byrne, 2021). Whilst the deductive approach did not involve *a priori* coding nor development of a codebook, it did consider a range of wellbeing theories, concepts and ideas while developing codes, aligned with RTA (Braun et al. 2018; Braun & Clarke 2021).

3. Results

3.1 Linguistic representations of wellbeing

Figure 2 illustrates the words most commonly used by regular AYPs to describe wellbeing, with larger words reflecting a greater frequency (min = 3, max = 41), with no specific representation for colour. The most frequently used words were “well”, “feeling”, “mental”, “body”, and “physical”. We identified clusters of words representing physical (i.e., body, physical, physically), mental (i.e., mind, mental, mentally), emotional (i.e., emotions, emotional), relational (i.e., others, social, relationships, connections, people), and spiritual (i.e., spirit, spiritual) dimensions of wellbeing. Wellbeing was also commonly defined by using words such as “good”, “well”, and “positive”. Other frequent words that stood out at this stage included “life”, “able”, “state”, “balance”, “peace”, “harmony”, and “contentment” (see Supplement 5 for details).

Participants’ responses varied in length (min = 1, max = 87) with an average of 16 words (see Supplement 5). RTA involved active reflection and interpretation of codes across the dataset and beyond exact words to develop the final themes. The RTA yielded 4 overarching themes depicting the nature of wellbeing. These overarching themes stemmed from 73 sub-themes within 17 main themes. Table 1 summarises these overarching and main themes with representative quotes for each sub-theme, in addition to the number of participants mentioning each sub-theme and the equivalent percentage. It is noteworthy that sub-themes and themes contribute to sense-making and the meaning of the overarching theme, and that the number of mentions does not represent their relevance, but rather provides information on the reflexive and interpretative process (see Supplement 6).

Figure 2

Words Used by Regular AYPs to Define Wellbeing

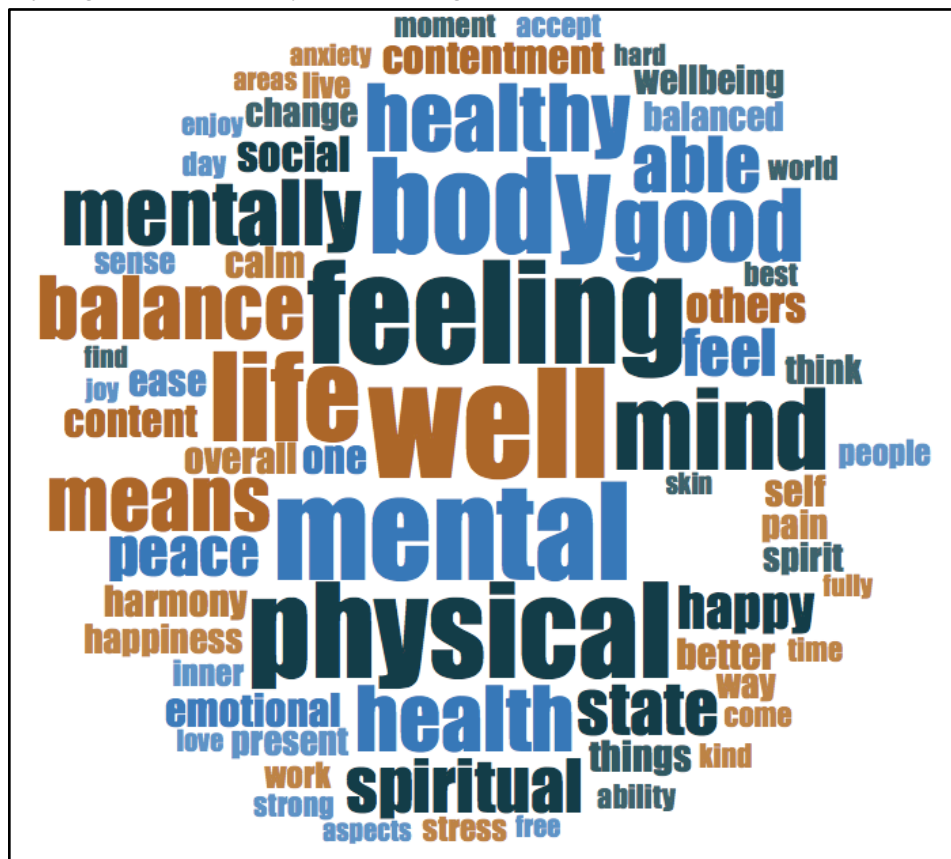


Table 1
Regular AYPs' Perceptions of Wellbeing.

Main Themes	Sub-themes	Representative Quotes	N	%
(1) Multidimensional nature of wellbeing				
<i>Wellbeing is comprised of different dimensions</i>				
Emotional 12.25%	Low intensity positive emotions	<i>"Being calm, healthy and content"</i>	84	7.14
	Emotional health	<i>"Physical, emotional and psychological health"</i>	24	2.04
	High intensity positive emotions	<i>"Mental and physical stability combined with a joyful feeling"</i>	21	1.79
	Sense of ease or comfort	<i>"Feeling at ease in own body-mind, as well as with others"</i>	8	0.68
	Sense of enjoyment or pleasure	<i>"Being able to enjoy life"</i>	7	0.60
Psychological 9.20%	Mental health	<i>"Feeling good, mentally healthy"</i>	53	4.51
	Self-acceptance	<i>"That I'm content with myself in every aspect"</i>	20	1.70
	Self-care and support	<i>"It is knowing how to come back to that loving centre of inner support"</i>	12	1.02
	Autonomy	<i>"Capable of doing what I want or need to do it life"</i>	6	0.51
	Equanimity	<i>"Being steady in mind and body"</i>	5	0.43
	Meaning and purpose	<i>"Living out your calling/purpose that not only brings you happiness, but serves others"</i>	5	0.43
	Fulfilment	<i>"Something that underpins fulfilment in all areas of my life"</i>	3	0.26
	Personal growth	<i>"An overall acceptance of my current state of being and the goal of being better"</i>	2	0.17
	Resilience	<i>"The strength to endure difficult situations and the ability to bounce back from adversity. In short, to be resilient."</i>	2	0.17
	Physical 8.68%	Physical health	<i>"Healthy body"</i>	86
Vitality		<i>"Feeling healthy and energetic"</i>	6	0.51
Strength		<i>"When the body is able to move the way I like it to and feels strong and full of energy"</i>	4	0.34
Longevity		<i>"Feeling young"</i>	3	0.26
Nutrition		<i>"It's important for me to keep moving and eat well"</i>	2	0.17
Rest		<i>"Making sure you are well rested"</i>	1	0.09
Spiritual 4.09%	Spiritual health	<i>"Well-being is physical, mental and spiritual"</i>	22	1.87
	Transcendence	<i>"It means I can more fully understand where I stand in relation to everything"</i>	15	1.28

Main Themes	Sub-themes	Representative Quotes	N	%
Social 3.85%		<i>around me"</i>		
	Observance	<i>"Being awake or conscious"</i>	11	0.94
	Harmonious relationships	<i>"Being a good person to self and others effortlessly"</i>	16	1.36
	Environmental connection	<i>"Feeling connected to the people, nature and the world around me"</i>	7	0.60
	Social connection	<i>"Feeling purposeful and connected to others"</i>	6	0.51
	Social wellbeing	<i>"Physical, mental and social wellbeing"</i>	5	0.43
	Enjoyment of social connections	<i>"Enjoying time with loved ones"</i>	5	0.43
	Boundaries	<i>"Mental clarity to say no to what doesn't makes you feel good"</i>	2	0.17
	Social support	<i>"Being able to ask for and find help"</i>	2	0.17
	Belongingness	<i>"Feeling like I have communities I belong to"</i>	1	0.09
	Social contribution	<i>"Living out your calling/purpose that not only brings you happiness, but serves others"</i>	1	0.09
Ethical 0.52%	Ethical behaviours	<i>"Not harming self as well as others in any way"</i>	3	0.26
	Moral principles	<i>"Have yamas and niyamas in balance"</i>	3	0.26
(2) Holistic Nature of Wellbeing				
<i>Dimensions of wellbeing are interconnected and make sense as a whole</i>				
Integration of dimensions 9.02%	Mind-Body plus emotional and/or social	<i>"Optimal mental, physical, social, emotional, and spiritual health"</i>	43	3.66
	Mind-Body	<i>"It is a state where in the mind and body are aligned together"</i>	40	3.40
	Mind-Body-Spirit	<i>"A synchronisation of mental, physical and spiritual health"</i>	23	1.96
Balance between dimensions 2.65%	Mental, physical and spiritual	<i>"Body, mind, and spiritual balance and harmony"</i>	10	0.85
	Internal and external	<i>"Being in balance and harmony, internally and with the external world"</i>	7	0.60
	Life balance	<i>"Balance. Mentally, spiritually. Applying this to all aspects of life."</i>	5	0.43
	Mental, physical, and emotional	<i>"The sensation of harmony or balance at a physical, mental and emotional level"</i>	4	0.34
	Mental and physical	<i>"A state of relative balance in all layers and sub-layers of being in one's life (physical/mental/emotional/spiritual)"</i>	2	0.17
	Mental, physical, and social	<i>"A balance in life of physical, mental, social, family."</i>	2	0.17

Main Themes	Sub-themes	Representative Quotes	N	%
	Mental and spiritual	<i>"Balance. Mentally, spiritually."</i>	1	0.09
Stability within dimensions 1.45%	Mental stability	<i>"I tend to view well-being holistically--it's hard to be well when not in good physical, mental, social, and spiritual shape. Some areas may be better nurtured at different times in life, but unless all are in proper proportion it's not easy to say that someone is doing well."</i>	6	0.51
	Physical stability		6	0.51
	Social stability		2	0.17
	Spiritual stability		2	0.17
	Emotional stability		1	0.09
(3) Non-Dualistic Nature of Wellbeing				
<i>Wellbeing transcends polarities and dualistic conceptualisations</i>				
Presence of and freedom from 14.63%	Presence of positive attributes	<i>"Have a healthy body and a free mind"</i>	136	11.56
	Freedom from illness and pain	<i>"Health/wellbeing is about freedom; freedom from illness/injury"</i>	21	1.79
	Presence and Freedom	<i>"A state of mind relatively calm and happy (...) to not have pain in body parts and in the mind"</i>	15	1.28
Process and state 10.89%	Internal state	<i>"Being healthy, feeling contentment"</i>	93	7.91
	Ongoing process	<i>"Finding a healthy and sustainable balance in life"</i>	25	2.13
	Process and state	<i>"A state of harmonious interaction between the physical, mental and spiritual aspects of being a human"</i>	10	0.85
Agency and receptiveness 4.51%	Power and motivation to change	<i>"You are at choice to put your best foot forward"</i>	31	2.64
	Accept and embrace change	<i>"Being content, accepting, compassionate and gentle. Of myself, the conditions I live in, other people."</i>	16	1.36
	Change and embrace	<i>"Being able to change the things I can change, and being able to accept the things I can't. The balance of change and accepting where I am now."</i>	6	0.51
Coping and thriving 3.24%	Optimal mode	<i>"It means when you can feel the best that you can, it refers to physical, mental and social wellbeing"</i>	17	1.45
	Coping mode			
	Coping and thriving	<i>"Being able to have the tools to cope with what life throws at you"</i> <i>"Feeling good, being balanced physically and mentally, being able to cope"</i>	12	1.02
Enabler and outcome 1.70%	Enabling higher quality of life	<i>"Wellbeing helps to live better myself and with others"</i>	12	1.02
	A result of actions or mindsets	<i>"It is a measure of my self-esteem"</i>	4	0.34

Main Themes	Sub-themes	Representative Quotes	N	%
	Enabler and outcome	<i>"Being well in the mind and that will then make a difference to the physical"</i>	4	0.34
(4) Dynamic Nature of Wellbeing				
<i>Wellbeing has an ever changing and evolving essence, from one individual to another and throughout the lifespan</i>				
Embodied experience 10.04%	Feeling	<i>"Feeling safe, peaceful and happy"</i>	40	3.40
	Being	<i>"Being at peace"</i>	39	3.32
	Doing	<i>"Keep moving and eat well"</i>	28	2.38
	Having	<i>"Have strong, well-built relationships"</i>	11	0.94
Context 2.04%	Inner dynamic	<i>"It is acknowledging myself as the source of my emotional, mental and physical state"</i>	8	0.68
	Inside-Out	<i>"Hard to explain but when you feel good, you can treat people better in general"</i>	8	0.68
	Outside-In	<i>"Becoming at peace with the challenges that come up in my days and my life"</i>	8	0.68
Time 1.36%	Present moment	<i>"Being conscious and equanimous in the present moment"</i>	10	0.85
	Impermanence	<i>"Acknowledging that the only constant is change"</i>	6	0.51

3.2 Overarching theme 1: The multidimensional nature of wellbeing

The first overarching theme was wellbeing as a multidimensional construct, represented by six main themes – emotional, psychological, physical, spiritual, social, and ethical dimensions – with many of the participants including multiple dimensions in their descriptions. For instance, one participant perceived wellbeing as *"being physically, mentally, spiritually and emotionally balanced"*. The "emotional" theme included a variety of positive states, ranging from high (e.g., joy, happiness) to low (e.g., peace, contentment) intensity, with the latter more frequently mentioned. Some participants pointed to a sense of enjoyment, noting for instance *"being able to enjoy life"*. Others pointed to a sense of ease, mentioning for example *"feeling at ease in own body-mind, as well as with others"*.

The "psychological" theme captured broader aspects of living well, including general mental health, self-acceptance, and self-care and support. For instance, one participant pointed to *"the capacity of feeling as comfortable as I can with myself"* (self-acceptance), and another spoke about *"health and maintenance of myself"* (self-care). Equanimity appeared as an interesting sub-theme representing a mental state. For instance, one participant described wellbeing as *"being steady in mind and body"*.

The "physical" theme included general mentions of physical health along with aspects of vitality, strength, longevity, nutrition, and the value of rest. For instance, participants spoke about *"when the body is able to move the way I like it to and feels strong and full of energy"*, *"feeling young"*, and *"making sure you are well rested with good food, water and sleep"*.

The "spiritual" theme reflected broad mentions of spiritual health with attitudes towards and beyond the self, such as self-transcendence and observance. Self-transcendence appeared in comments such as *"I can more fully understand where I stand in relation to everything around me"*. Participants pointed to the state of mind towards the self, like being *"aware"*, *"observant"* or *"awake"*, which was represented within the sub-theme observance. For instance, one participant

noted *“being observant and compassionate towards one’s own state”*.

The “social” theme captured various interpersonal aspects of life, including from overall mentions of social wellbeing to specific aspects such as the presence, quality, and enjoyment of relationships. For instance, one participant mentioned that wellbeing meant *“connection to others”* and another referred to it as *“enjoying time with loved ones”*. Participants also indicated the quality of those social connections as central to wellbeing, stating for instance *“have strong, well-built relationships with my partner and my friends so I can lean on them and they can lean on me”*. Participants pointed to the importance of harmonious relationships, depicting wellbeing for example as *“being a good person to self and others effortlessly”*. Beyond individual relationships, connection to nature and the surrounding environment was also regarded as an important part of wellbeing, with participants noting *“feeling connected to the people, nature and the world around me”* and *“being content, accepting, compassionate and gentle; of myself, the conditions I live in, other people”*.

The “ethical theme” reflected actions and beliefs avoiding maleficence and seeking beneficence. Participants spoke of ethical behaviours such as *“not harming self as well as others in any way”*, and moral principles such as having *“yamas and niyamas in balance”*. While the latter statement explicitly refers to the espoused principles and values of yoga, the former represents *ahimsa*, one aspect of the *yamas*.

3.3 Overarching theme 2: The holistic nature of wellbeing

The second overarching theme focused on the holistic nature of wellbeing, defined as *“the interconnection of wellbeing dimensions and their connection to the whole”*. This overarching theme can be represented by the following quote: *“well-being is physical, mental and spiritual; it is the full package”*. Within this overarching theme we identified three themes comprised of 15 sub-themes.

The “integration of dimensions” theme represented the connection between different dimensions. Regular AYPs considered that the integration of physical and mental domains was central to wellbeing. For instance, one participant perceived wellbeing as *“a state where in the mind and body are aligned together”*. Furthermore, participants pointed to other dimensions as co-existing in overall wellbeing, for instance defining wellbeing as *“optimal mental, physical, social, emotional, and spiritual health”* and as *“a synchronisation of mental, physical and spiritual health”*.

The “balance between dimensions” theme included seven sub-themes representing the equilibrium between different domains of wellbeing and life. Most sub-themes represented balance between the combination of multiple dimensions of wellbeing. This aligns with findings from the Word Count analysis, which uncovered the use of words such as *“balance”* and *“harmony”*, reflected in comments such as describing wellbeing as *“a state of relative balance in all layers and sub-layers of being in one’s life (physical/ mental/ emotional/ spiritual)”* or as *“the sensation of harmony or balance at a physical, mental and emotional level”*. Furthermore, participants alluded to balance between different elements of life, such as *“work”* and *“time for myself”*. For example, participants depicted wellbeing as *“finding a healthy and sustainable balance in life”* including internal-external balance, represented as *“being in balance and harmony, internally and with the external world”*.

The “stability within dimensions” theme reflected a sense of steadiness in each realm (i.e., physical, emotional, mental, social, spiritual, ethical). A participant noted that wellbeing is *“being well deep in my psyche; spiritual, physical, emotional, social stability”*. Another participant commented:

“I tend to view well-being holistically--it’s hard to be well when not in good physical, mental, social, and spiritual shape. Some areas may be better nurtured at different times”

in life, but unless all are in proper proportion it's not easy to say that someone is doing well."

3.4 Overarching theme 3: The non-dualistic nature of wellbeing

The third overarching theme reflected an understanding of wellbeing that embraces qualities often considered incommensurable, transcending typical polarities and dualistic conceptualisations. This overarching theme included five main themes representing different categories for seemingly dichotomous concepts, but where participants held conceptions that simultaneously encompassed both.

"Presence of and freedom from" was the first theme, and it represented wellbeing as having elements regarded as pleasant and the absence of unpleasant states. Most participants (81.93%) mentioned positive states or traits to define wellbeing. For example, one participant noted that wellbeing is to *"have a healthy body and a free mind"*. Other participants defined wellbeing as not experiencing "illness", "pain" or "suffering". For instance, one regular practitioner stated that *"health/wellbeing is about freedom; freedom from illness/injury"*. A subset of participants perceived wellbeing as comprising positive attributes and the lack of negative qualities. One practitioner perceived wellbeing as *"a state of mind relatively calm and happy...to not have pain in body parts and in the mind"*.

A second theme was conceiving wellbeing as a "process and state". This included perceiving wellbeing as a continuous journey rather than an end destination. This was illustrated in one participant's statement, referring to wellbeing as *"finding a healthy and sustainable balance in life"*. Wellbeing was also perceived as a state experienced in one point in time. For instance, one regular practitioner spoke about *"being healthy, feeling contentment"*. Regular AYPs also brought these both elements into their definitions. For example, one practitioner defined wellbeing as *"a state of harmonious interaction between the physical, mental and spiritual aspects of being a human"*, reflecting both the fluid (process) and fixed (state) nature of wellbeing.

The third theme, "agency and receptiveness", represented wellbeing as being able to actively manage or change one's own state and/or circumstances. For instance, one participant noted *"you are at choice to put your best foot forward"*, reflecting a personal sense of agency. Participants also regarded wellbeing as being receptive, adopting an accepting and embracing attitude toward change. For instance, one regular practitioner defined wellbeing as *"an overall acceptance of my current state of being"*. Participants also mentioned wellbeing as encompassing both the ability to change and to embrace change, noting for instance: *"Being able to change the things I can change, and being able to accept the things I can't. The balance of change and accepting where I am now."*

The fourth theme, "coping and thriving", reflected the perspective that wellbeing involves simultaneously facing adversities and flourishing. This included having sufficient coping skills, with participants noting for instance: *"being able to have the tools to cope with what life throws at you"*. Participants also pointed to the ability to be at their best. For example, one participant stated that wellbeing *"means when you can feel the best that you can"*. Respondents also regarded wellbeing as simultaneously involving coping and thriving abilities. As one participant described, wellbeing is *"feeling good, being balanced physically and mentally, being able to cope"*.

Finally, conceiving wellbeing as "enabler and outcome" was the fifth theme. This reflected wellbeing as both facilitating other aspects of life, and because of other aspects of life. Participants noted *"wellbeing helps to live better myself and with others"* and *"being well in the mind, and that will then make a difference to the physical"*. Participants also pointed to the role of actions and mindset, seeing *"it is a measure of my self-esteem"*. Other practitioners defined wellbeing as both being a facilitator and a result. One participant, for example, defined wellbeing as *"being well in the mind"*

and that will then make a difference to the physical”.

3.5 Overarching theme 4: The dynamic nature of wellbeing

The final overarching theme referred to the ever-changing and evolving essence of wellbeing, from one individual to another and throughout their lifespan. Here we identified nine sub-themes, grouped into three key features. This overarching theme can be exemplified in this practitioner’s definition: *“wellbeing means feeling at peace with the current moment, grateful for the past and welcoming the future”*.

Firstly, the “embodied experience” theme accounts for wellbeing being subjectively experienced, not only through the mind, but also with the body. What and how wellbeing is perceived, was represented by verbs used by participants, such as “feeling”, “being”, “doing”, and “having”. Some definitions of wellbeing reflecting this embodied experience were *“being at peace”, “keep moving and eat well”, “feeling safe, peaceful and happy”* and *“have strong, well-built relationships”*.

Secondly, the “context” theme represents wellbeing in relation to a setting and the influence it may or may not have in people’s lived experience. Although environmental factors were mentioned in people’s responses, definitions of wellbeing mainly pointed to internal dynamics, excluding external factors. For example, one participant portrayed wellbeing as *“acknowledging myself as the source of my emotional, mental and physical state”*. Practitioners also described wellbeing as being part of a dynamic in which the internal experience is reflected in behaviours impacting in the environment. For instance, one participant stated: *“hard to explain but when you feel good, you can treat people better in general”*. Finally, practitioners mentioned that wellbeing involved a dynamic in which one can find an internal stability during turbulent times. One practitioner, for example, commented that wellbeing is *“becoming at peace with the challenges that come up in my days and my life”*.

Finally, the third theme encompassed wellbeing as being dynamically bounded to time, with two main features: 1) wellbeing as occurring in the present moment, and more specifically, within the current experience, such as *“being conscious and equanimous in the present moment”*; and 2) impermanence, alluding to the transient nature of existence. This can be exemplified in this practitioner’s words: *“acknowledging that the only constant is change”*.

4. Discussion

People can perceive and experience wellbeing in a variety of ways, not necessarily fitting mainstream models proposed by theorists connected to the positive psychology discipline (Bharara et al., 2019; Black & Kern, 2020; Hone et al., 2015; Huang et al., 2020). Alternative research methods such as qualitative and mixed methods approaches offer a deeper and broader understanding of wellbeing, with possibilities of developing more inclusive, integrative definitions (Hefferon et al., 2017; Kern et al., 2020; Lomas et al., 2020), and more specific definitions that are particularly relevant to certain populations. In the present study, we examined regular AYPs’ perceptions of wellbeing, finding definitions and elements that go well beyond the common wellbeing models within the positive psychology literature. Although findings cannot be generalised to other populations, they provide insights into expanded perspectives on wellbeing that may indeed resonate with other populations.

4.1 Extending mainstream and emerging conceptualisations of wellbeing

Aligned with many of the existing models of wellbeing (e.g., Deci & Ryan, 2008; Huppert, 2014;

Keyes & Annas, 2009; Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Seligman, 2011), multidimensionality was a core feature in regular AYPs' conceptualisations of wellbeing. This is consistent with findings from recent studies taking ideographic approaches across different groups of people (Black & Kern, 2020; Bourke & Gelden, 2007; Huang et al., 2020), underscoring the importance of including multiple facets when defining, measuring, and improving wellbeing. Like these other ideographic studies, our findings support the need to identify which dimensions might be relevant to a given population, rather than assuming what dimensions matter. In this case, emotional, psychological, physical, spiritual, social, and ethical dimensions were most relevant.

Several of these dimensions align with existing models. For example, the presence of positive emotions, the sense of enjoyment, and positive relationships appear across various models (e.g., Diener et al., 2009; Keyes, 2007; Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Seligman, 2011), as well as psychological elements mentioned by participants, such as autonomy, meaning, purpose, resilience, self-acceptance, personal growth, and fulfillment (e.g., Ryff, 1989; Seligman, 2011). Unlike these models, participants spoke to spiritual and ethical dimensions.

Within the spiritual side, sub-dimensions aligned with Büssing et al.'s (2007) construct of spirituality, encompassing awareness and connection to oneself and beyond. Interestingly, their conceptualisation also includes compassion, gratitude, equanimity, meaning and conscious interactions, elements that were also noted by regular AYPs in this study, yet were classified as part of either emotional, psychological, or social wellbeing. The ethical dimension aligns with studies focused on moral judgements and ethical behaviours (e.g., Hannah et al., 2011). Sustainable behaviour (e.g., pro-ecological, frugal, altruistic behaviours toward the environment) has been linked to increased levels of wellbeing (Corral-Verdugo et al., 2011). This dimension also aligns with the aforementioned conceptualisation of spirituality, where values and ethical norms are described as part of this construct (Büssing et al., 2007). The overlap of elements from spiritual and ethical dimensions with other wellbeing dimensions and with spirituality point to the need to further explore and clarify these areas.

The conceptualisation of wellbeing as the presence of positive attributes was clear, with participants pointing to wellbeing as a state consistent with complete health (Keyes, 2007) or optimal functioning (Deci & Ryan, 2008). However, they also viewed wellbeing as a process that leads to other positive outcomes. That is, participants viewed wellbeing as both an enabler and an outcome. These insights reveal the complexity and dynamism of the construct, which may require novel approaches to articulate the diversity and layers of the properties of wellbeing, rather than linear, reductionistic perspectives across time.

Although the concept of balance has been deemed relevant to wellbeing, it still constitutes an emerging area. Lomas (2021) coined the term balance/harmony to refer to both the relationship between two phenomena (i.e., balance) and the dynamic relationship of these balancing phenomena (i.e., harmony). Consistent with this definition and with previous research on lay conceptualisations of wellbeing (e.g., Delle-Fave 2016), regular AYPs included the concept of balance in their definitions, referring to the relationship held between two or more wellbeing dimensions. Similarly, AYPs described wellbeing in terms of integration of multiple dimensions and stability within each dimension. These definitions also illustrate Lomas' (2021) proposition of balance/harmony as a 'golden thread' or unifying principle underpinning all dimensions of wellbeing.

4.2 Knowing about wellbeing through embodied experience

Interestingly, participants often referred to their embodied experience to conceptualise wellbeing, using words like "feeling", "being", and "doing". This aligns to what Kahneman and

Riis (2005) defined as experienced wellbeing, comprising the introspection of moment-to-moment lived experiences. Here, some participants specifically defined wellbeing in terms of the current experience and mentioned the element of impermanence, aligning with the proposition that experienced wellbeing encompasses the present experience as it unfolds. Furthermore, experienced wellbeing is mostly represented in feeling positive emotions, and thus, is linked to hedonic wellbeing (Kahneman & Riis, 2005). Regular AYPs often defined wellbeing in terms of emotional health or experiencing positive emotions. Consistent with findings in other groups of people (e.g., Black & Kern, 2020) and Eastern cultures (Lim, 2016; Lu & Gilmour, 2004), practitioners highlighted the presence of low intensity positive emotions as part of wellbeing. This contrasts with focus on high intensity positive emotions prominent across various emotion-based measures, which were less prominent in this study, but are generally valued in Westernised population (Tsai, 2007). Conceptualisations of wellbeing also involved either experiencing a sense of ease or a sense of enjoyment. While both could be considered a pleasant experience, they differ in the quality of the actual experience, similar to high and low arousal positive emotions. This suggests that hedonic wellbeing is wider and more nuanced than the sole presence of positive emotions and absence of negative emotions (Deci & Ryan, 2008). It also suggests an alignment with a dimensional approach to positive affect comprising different levels of emotional activation and pleasantness (Richardson et al., 2016).

Participants' conceptualisations of wellbeing were described beyond the emotional (i.e., feeling), including other embodied elements (i.e., being, doing), suggesting that practitioners can know about wellbeing through the body. This is consistent with embodiment frameworks stating that "all psychological processes are influenced by body morphology, sensory systems, motor systems, and emotions" (Glenberg, 2010, p. 586). With yoga being a physical practice able to affect the autonomic nervous (Muehsam et al., 2017; Streeter et al., 2012), musculoskeletal (Francis & Beemer, 2019), endocrine, and immune systems (Muehsam et al., 2017), regular practitioners' corporal abilities may differ from other groups of people, thus influencing their mental processes and how they conceptualise wellbeing. For instance, breathing techniques used in yoga can improve the balance of the autonomic nervous system and foster stress resilience and a state of "calm alertness" (Brown & Gerbarg, 2005; 2009). Similarly, practices involving mindfulness meditation such as yoga, have been related to enhanced interoception (Gibson, 2019), the ability to perceive physiological changes in internal organs (Hefferon, 2013).

Beyond emotional elements, practitioners' conceptualisations of wellbeing revealed the relevance and richness of other elements of the internal context, which are more concordant with eudaimonic wellbeing. While the emotional aspects discussed earlier are typically considered as hedonic wellbeing, and more representative of experienced wellbeing, these eudaimonic elements can also be accessible for introspection through people's lived experiences. This was reflected in expressions such as "being able", "being awake", or "living", representing a state of human existence. Kahneman and Riis (2005) refer to this as "experienced eudaimonia", which can provide a "comprehensive description of internal life" (p. 18). Some elements representing these eudaimonic conceptualisations of wellbeing involved receptiveness, observance, and equanimity, which represent a common thread in contemplative philosophies and practices.

Regular AYPs' defined wellbeing in experienced eudaimonic terms by underlining not only optimal functioning but also coping abilities. Typically, models of eudaimonic wellbeing include personal attributes considered virtuous, rather than capabilities to accept, deal with, and overcome adversity. In contrast, practitioners regarded coping skills as central to dealing with, adapting, and responding to change and life challenges. The resource-congruence model (Wong et al., 2006) highlights the relevance of adaptive coping strategies and the ability to match them

to particular contexts to decrease stress and increase wellbeing. For instance, acceptance towards external and internal elements can be considered existential coping strategies, especially when facing uncertainty and change (Wong et al., 2006). Further exploring the notion of experienced wellbeing, both in hedonic and eudaimonic terms, as well as the possibility of embodied wellbeing as ways of knowing about wellbeing, may provide an avenue to understand optimal human functioning through an embodied perspective.

4.3 Underlying philosophical assumptions in AYPs' wellbeing conceptualisations

Practitioners' conceptualisations of wellbeing can also be discussed in terms of the implicit assumptions and underpinning worldviews. Potentially anchored in yogic traditions and further elaborated from contemporary philosophical systems, this discussion may provide further insights in the ways wellbeing is conceptualised and studied.

Regular AYPs tended to perceive wellbeing holistically and establish an interconnection between dimensions, emphasising the mind-body connection. Holistic thought has been described as the tendency to perceive phenomena as a whole, focusing on the relationships between an object and the field, and has been related to interdependent self-construals and East-Asian and Aboriginal cultures (Henrich et al., 2010). Holistic thought also underpins non-Western health frameworks, such as traditional Chinese medicine (Chan et al., 2002), and Ayurveda (Chauhan & Maheshwari, 2021), which is intricately connected to yoga. Indian philosophy systems sustaining yoga, such as Samkhya and the Vedas, also take a holistic approach to the study of human existence (Tigunait, 2014). These views contrast with conventional models that compartmentalise health into specific silos (Saylor, 2004). Practitioners' conceptualisations reflected a holistic view of health, which may be supported by the aforementioned approaches, providing an internal frame of reference to define wellbeing.

Furthermore, Eastern and Aboriginal models view health as a dynamic interaction between mind and body, as well as with other elements from social, spiritual, and natural environments (Butler et al., 2019; Chauhan & Maheshwari, 2021). This aligns with practitioners' conceptualisations and can be related to philosophical foundations of yoga. For example, traditional texts such as *The Yoga Sutras* highlight yoga as a practice for stilling the mind, with *asana* practice involving the development of both steady body and a calm mind (Iyengar, 2002). Within the Yoga philosophy system, Tigunait (2014) argued that physical calmness and stillness flows into the mental realm, keeping the mind quiet and harmonious, enabling the development of the higher stages of yoga entailing consciousness. This contrasts to the still prevailing Cartesian view in health sciences, conceptualising body and mind as separate and essentially different entities that are studied by separated fields (Saylor, 2004). New paradigms might be needed to fully understand and explain the mind-body connection, and specifically in relation to wellbeing.

4.4 Implications

Most research and models on wellbeing have predominately taken a cognitive approach, mostly assuming that knowledge about wellbeing is accessed through the mind (Hefferon, 2013). Wellbeing conceptualisations from regular AYPs suggest that this knowledge is embodied, meaning that cognitions rely on body structure and functions, which are embedded in a broader psychosocial context (Varela et al., 2016). Following embodiment approaches, symbols such as the construct of wellbeing become meaningful through perception, experience, and interaction with the objects and situations such symbols represent, rooting through emotions, actions, and senses (Glenberg, 2010). An embodied perspective to wellbeing explicitly acknowledges the role of the body to comprehend and generate wellbeing language, for instance linking interoception

and the use of metaphors representing wellbeing.

Findings from this study pose the need to consider alternative paradigms to understand how the mind and body work together in achieving optimal human functioning. Wellbeing research and practice may benefit from the development of a transdisciplinary and holistic model of wellbeing in which mind and body are acknowledged as an integrated system to experience, comprehend, and nurture wellbeing. Emergent research and models involving the interconnection of biological, psychological, and social spheres of health are taking an integrative (Kemp et al., 2017; Yang & Immordino-Yang, 2017) and interdisciplinary approach (Mead et al., 2021), providing the foundations to develop more comprehensive wellbeing frameworks.

In moving towards more complex models, applying a systems approach to an individual level may also enhance this understanding (Kern et al., 2020). Current wellbeing models do not explain relationships between nor integrate different individual dimensions. Thayer et al. (2009) argue that an exhaustive wellbeing model should explain the complexity and diversity of physiological, affective, cognitive, and behavioural factors contributing to health and illness. Furthermore, the multidimensional nature of wellbeing also points to the need of progressing towards more sophisticated models conceptualising and addressing wellbeing beyond the individual level. For instance, Mead et al. (2021) propose a model integrating individual (i.e., physical and psychological), relational, community, and environmental spheres to tap into an unacknowledged potential to promote collective wellbeing while also enhancing individual wellbeing.

4.5 Limitations and future directions

This study explored conceptualisations of wellbeing specifically in regular AYPs. The qualitative approach allowed the perspectives and voices of the participants themselves to come to life. However, several limitations must be acknowledged. Firstly, although RTA does not specify word limits for the analysis, the length of responses in some cases limited the reflection and interpretation of data. Still, the sample size allowed us to find patterns and shared meaning across participants. Secondly, the tools to collect data and the interpretation of findings were influenced by the backgrounds and expertise of the authors in the fields of psychology, wellbeing, and yoga. While this allowed researchers to identify, comprehend, and synthesise key elements in participants' conceptualisations of wellbeing, interpretations are strongly bounded to knowledge and expertise from those fields. Lastly, this study was exploratory. Associations between yoga and wellbeing have been hypothesised based on previous research, theoretical models and philosophical assumptions coming from a range of fields, and these relationships should be further investigated.

Future studies might examine the different dimensions of wellbeing identified in this study. This would allow a richer comprehension of the type and quality of elements that are relevant to practitioners for each area of wellbeing. A specific area to continue exploring is the spiritual and ethical dimensions. There seems to be an overlap of concepts in the literature between definitions of spirituality and elements traditionally pertaining to psychological or emotional wellbeing. Furthermore, spiritual wellbeing has been mainly studied from different fields, such as nursing and medicine (e.g., Canada et al., 2008), and differences with spirituality are not clear. Future research should address these constructs. Similarly, although the ethical dimension was relevant, it was not represented strongly across participants. Future research examining ethical and moral elements of yoga in more depth may contribute to understand its implications to a further extent.

5. Conclusion

Regular AYPs provided a dynamic and integrated perspective to wellbeing, supporting and expanding current views on optimal functioning. The combination of the nature of yoga and the devotion to a regular practice may contribute to shaping practitioners' physical and mental processes. This might influence the ways in which wellbeing is perceived, experienced and conceptualised, through pathways and strategies that naturally arise within AY, but might expand to affect approaches to wellbeing that integrate the body, mind, and soul.

Conflict of interest statement

The authors report no conflicts of interest.

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Research design and planning were conducted by DRD, in collaboration with PK and HS. Reflexive Thematic Analysis was undertaken by DRD, with feedback from PK and HS. This article was written by DRD, with revisions and editing by PK and HS.

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