

ARTICLE INFORMATION

Received: May 18, 2026

Revised: May 31, 2026

Available online: June 08, 2026

at: <https://e-jurnal.ipphorr.com/index.php/mchc>

The effectiveness of prenatal yoga in reducing anxiety levels among pregnant women in primary health care: A literature review

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Abstract

Background: Anxiety in pregnant women is a common maternal mental health issue, particularly during the third trimester. This condition can negatively impact both maternal and fetal health, leading to sleep disturbances, elevated blood pressure, preterm labor, and postpartum depression. One widely used non-pharmacological intervention to reduce anxiety in pregnant women is prenatal yoga.

Purpose: to analyze the effectiveness of prenatal yoga in reducing anxiety levels among pregnant women in primary healthcare settings.

Method: This study employed a literature review using a narrative approach. Articles were electronically searched via the Google Scholar, PubMed, and ScienceDirect databases. Inclusion criteria included research articles published between 2021 and 2026, written in Indonesian or English, available in full text. The article selection process utilized the PRISMA flow diagram, resulting in 8 articles meeting the inclusion criteria.

Results: The findings indicate that all articles state prenatal yoga is effective in reducing anxiety levels in pregnant women, particularly during the third trimester. The mechanism by which prenatal yoga reduces anxiety is related to stimulation of the parasympathetic nervous system, a decrease in cortisol levels, and an increase in endorphins and serotonin, which play a role in creating a sense of comfort and calm.

Conclusion: Prenatal yoga is an effective, safe, and easily implementable nonpharmacological intervention in primary healthcare to help reduce anxiety levels in pregnant women. Prenatal yoga can be recommended as part of integrated antenatal care to support maternal mental health and improve the quality of life for pregnant women

Keyword: Anxiety; Pregnant Women; Prenatal Yoga.

INTRODUCTION

Pregnancy is a physiological process experienced by women and is accompanied by various physical, hormonal, psychological, and social changes. These changes can affect the emotional state of pregnant women, leading to feelings of anxiety, fear, and worry during pregnancy. Anxiety in pregnant women is generally related to the health of the fetus, the labor process, changes in body shape, readiness to become a parent, and the possibility of complications during pregnancy or childbirth. Anxiety levels in pregnant women tend to increase in the third trimester as they begin to face childbirth preparations and increasingly noticeable physical changes (Hasibuan,

Siregar, & Harahap, 2024).

Anxiety during pregnancy is one of the maternal mental health issues that requires serious attention. According to the World Health Organization, maternal mental health is a crucial component of maternal healthcare, as a mother's psychological state can impact both her own health and that of the fetus. Pregnant women experiencing excessive anxiety are at risk of sleep disturbances, elevated blood pressure, fatigue, and complications during the labor process. Additionally, unmanaged anxiety can increase the risk of preterm birth, low birth weight, and postpartum depression (World Health Organization, 2022).

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Research conducted other research indicates that approximately 28.7% of pregnant women in Indonesia experience anxiety leading up to childbirth. This finding highlights that anxiety among pregnant women remains a significant challenge in maternal healthcare, particularly within primary healthcare settings such as community health centers (Ramadhan & Febriyani, 2025).

Primary healthcare services, such as community health centers, play a crucial role in promotive and preventive efforts regarding the health of pregnant women, including maternal mental health. Current antenatal care services no longer focus solely on physical examinations of pregnancy but also encompass the psychological aspects of pregnant women. Therefore, safe, easy-to-implement, and effective non-pharmacological interventions are needed to help reduce anxiety during pregnancy. One widely used approach is relaxation therapy through prenatal yoga (Ministry of Health of the Republic of Indonesia, 2023).

Prenatal yoga is a modified form of yoga designed specifically for pregnant women, combining breathing techniques, meditation, relaxation, muscle stretching, and safe postural exercises during pregnancy. Prenatal yoga is known to provide a relaxing effect, enhance physical comfort, improve sleep quality, train breathing techniques in preparation for childbirth, and help manage emotions and stress in pregnant women. Prenatal yoga activities can also increase the production of endorphins, which play a role in creating a sense of comfort and calm, thereby helping to reduce anxiety levels in pregnant women (Kundarti, Titisari, Sepdianto, Karnasih, & Sugijati, 2020).

Various studies have shown that prenatal yoga has a positive effect on reducing anxiety levels in pregnant women. A other study demonstrated a significant reduction in anxiety levels among pregnant women in the third trimester following prenatal yoga sessions. Another study also found that gentle prenatal yoga is effective in reducing anxiety levels in both primigravidas and multigravidas. Additionally, a other research stated that prenatal yoga helps pregnant women become more relaxed and better prepared for childbirth. These findings suggest that prenatal yoga can be considered as one of the non-pharmacological interventions in maternal health care at primary health care facilities (Utami, & Zolekhah, 2021; Sulastrri, Syamsuddin, Idris, & Limoa, 2021; Setiyarini, Putri, Andini, & Rahmawati, 2024).

RESEARCH METHOD

The method used by the authors is a literature review with a narrative approach to analyze and synthesize various research findings regarding the effectiveness of prenatal yoga in reducing anxiety levels among pregnant women in primary healthcare settings. Articles were searched electronically via the Google Scholar, PubMed, and ScienceDirect databases. The authors used the search keywords: prenatal yoga, anxiety, and pregnant women. The inclusion criteria were articles discussing prenatal yoga and its effects on anxiety levels in pregnant women; articles published between 2021 and 2026; articles in Indonesian or English; articles available in full text; and those employing quantitative, quasi-experimental, randomized controlled trial, or systematic review research designs. The article search process was described and documented using a PRISMA flow diagram.

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DOI: 10.56922/mchc.v5i2.3114

RESEARCH RESULTS

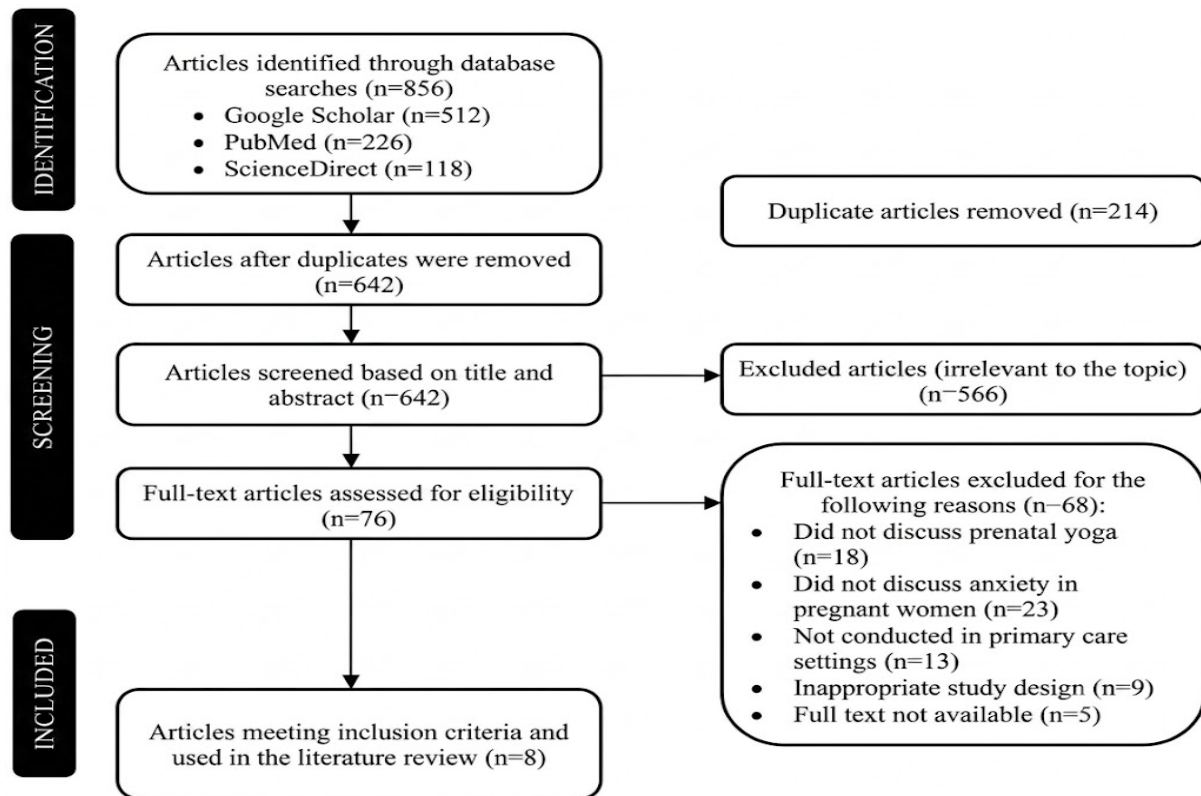


Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram

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Table 1. Results of the Literature Review

(Author, Years) (Country)	Purpose	Method	Results
(Utami & Zolekhah, 2021) (Indonesia)	To understand the impact of relaxation in prenatal yoga against the anxiety level in pregnant women	This study used a quasi-experimental pre- and post-test method with a cross-sectional approach. The sample consisted of 16 pregnant women in their third trimester, divided into two groups using purposive sampling.	Prenatal yoga has an effect on reducing anxiety in pregnant women in preparing for childbirth, the results of the analysis using chi-square obtained $p < 0.001$ RR Score = 5.64 at 95% CI 1.99-15.93 which means that relaxation treatment in prenatal yoga has a significant effect on reducing anxiety in pregnant women ($p < 0.05$).
(Novianti et al., 2024) (Indonesia)	To find out the effect of prenatal yoga on anxiety levels in pregnant women in the third trimester.	Design is a Pre-Experimental Design with a One Group Pretest-Posttest Design approach. With a population of 41 primigravida mothers in the third trimester, the sampling technique used total sampling with a total sample of 27 primigravida mothers in the third trimester who met the inclusion criteria. The research instrument used the PRAQ-R2 (pregnancy Associated Anxiety Questionnaire-Revised) questionnaire to measure anxiety levels before and after prenatal yoga.	Then the data was analyzed using the Wilcoxon Rank correlation test and a value of p was smaller than α , namely ($0.000 < 0.05$). Shows the influence of prenatal yoga on the anxiety level of primigravid mothers in the third trimester after prenatal yog
(Irawati et al., 2023) (Indonesia)	To explain the effect of the combination of prenatal yoga and self-hypnosis on the anxiety level of pregnant	Quasi-experimental research, pretest-posttest with control group design. The study population was all pregnant women with Preeclampsia who visited Anna Medika	There is an effect of the combination of prenatal yoga and self-hypnosis on anxiety levels before and after treatment, ($p: 0.000$) and there is a significant difference in

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	women with Preeclampsia.	Madura Hospital as many as 40 people, the sample size was 20 people each for the treatment group and control group. Sampling with consecutive sampling. Research instruments Anxiety of each group was measured before and after the intervention, using the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI) questionnaire. Statistical analysis Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test and Mann Whitney U Test.	momentary anxiety levels between the treatment group and the control group ($p: 0.000$).
(Muthoharoh & Asmarani, 2024) (Indonesia)	To determine the effectiveness of prenatal yoga in reducing the anxiety of pregnant women facing childbirth.	The research design used was an experiment, purposive sampling with a sample of 32 third-trimester pregnant women direct data collection using the STAI questionnaire instrument. The research results were analyzed using the Wilcoxon test. The results showed that all respondents experienced a decrease in their level of anxiety from moderate to mild after doing prenatal yoga.	The results of the analysis obtained the value of Asymp. Sig.(2-tailed) $0.000 < 0.05$, meaning there is a correlation between the effectiveness of prenatal yoga in reducing anxiety for pregnant women facing labour
(Corrigan et al., 2022) (Ireland)	To determine the characteristics and effectiveness of pregnancy yoga interventions: A systematic review and meta-analysis.	Nine electronic databases were searched: MEDLINE, PsycINFO, EMBASE, CINAHL, WHOLIS, AMED, ScieLo, ASSIA and Web of Science. Randomised control trials and quasi-experimental studies examining pregnancy yoga interventions were eligible. Covidence was used to screen titles, abstracts, and full-text articles. Outcomes of	Of 862 citations retrieved, 31 studies met inclusion criteria. Twenty-nine studies with 2217 pregnant women were included for meta-analysis. Pregnancy yoga interventions reduced anxiety (SMD: -0.91; 95% CI: -1.49 to -0.33; $p = 0.002$), depression (SMD: -0.47; 95% CI: -0.9 to -0.04, $P = 0.03$) and perceived stress

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		interest were stress, anxiety, depression, quality of life, labour duration, pain management in labour and mode of birth.	(SMD: -1.03; 95% CI: -1.55 to -0.52; $p < 0.001$). Yoga interventions also reduced duration of labour (MD = -117.75; 95% CI -153.80 to -81.71, $p < 0.001$) and, increased odds of normal vaginal birth (OR 2.58; 95% CI 1.46–4.56, $p < 0.001$) and tolerance for pain.
(Sulastri et al., 2021) (Indonesia)	to analyze the effectiveness of gentle prenatal yoga on the anxiety problem in primigravida and multigravida pregnant women.	The applied research design in this study was a quasi-experiment with a non-equivalent control group design approach. Samples were selected using a purposive sample technique. Furthermore, the instrument used was the Hamilton Anxiety Rating Scale (HARS) questionnaire. The number of samples in this study was 24 respondents divided into two groups, 12 in the intervention group and 12 in the control group.	the HARS scores in the intervention group showed that the mean rank of the pre-test was 23.75. In the mid-test, it was 20.00, and in the post-test, it was 16.00. Meanwhile, in the control group, its mean rank was 23.50, mid-test it was 21.58, and the post-test it was 20.41 showed that the intervention group experienced a significant decrease in anxiety levels. From the results of the Mann Whitney test, the intervention group $p = 0.001 < (\alpha 0.05)$ showed that there were significant changes.
(Kiselev, 2021) (Russia)	to evaluate the influence of Yoga exercises training on stress reduction during pregnancy.	In the current study we included 20 women who participated in the Yoga exercises training during pregnancy. The control group included 20 women who were in the reading control condition during pregnancy. Women were eligible to participate if they were experiencing elevated levels of perceived stress or pregnancy-specific	ANOVA has revealed ($p < .05$) that women in the Yoga exercises training experienced larger decreases from pre-to postintervention in pregnancy-specific anxiety and pregnancy-related anxiety than participants in the reading control condition.

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		anxiety (PSA), as indicated by responses to the Perceived Stress Scale and the PSA scale on a screening questionnaire. Women enrolled between 12 and 26 weeks gestation were randomly assigned to either the Yoga exercises training or to the reading control condition.	
(Domínguez-Solís et al., 2021) (Spain)	To determine published non-pharmacological interventions to reduce anxiety during pregnancy, childbirth and postpartum.	A systematic peer-review of experimental and quasi-experimental studies was conducted using the PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science (WOS), and CINAHL databases. The quality of the studies was assessed using the Spanish version of the PEDro scale. Two researchers participated independently in the data selection and extraction process.	587 articles were identified, of which 21 met the eligibility criteria. In eleven studies the intervention was performed during pregnancy, in three of them during labour, in four of them during the postpartum period, and in three of them during pregnancy and postpartum. During pregnancy, the most effective interventions were behavioural activation, cognitive behavioural therapy, yoga, music therapy, and relaxation; during childbirth: aromatherapy; during pregnancy and postpartum: antenatal training, massage by partners, and self-guided book reading with professional telephone assistance.

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Most participants were women in their third trimester of pregnancy, as anxiety tends to increase during this period leading up to childbirth. Sample sizes in the primary studies ranged from 24 to 45 participants, while the systematic review and meta-analysis involved dozens of research articles on prenatal yoga and maternal mental health. The findings indicate that all articles reported that prenatal yoga has a positive effect on reducing anxiety levels in pregnant women. Other research showed that relaxation in prenatal yoga effectively reduces anxiety levels in third-trimester pregnant women. Breathing techniques, meditation, and relaxation in yoga help women become calmer and better able to manage stress as childbirth approaches (Utami & Zolekhah, 2021).

Other research also showed a decrease in anxiety scores among primigravida women in the third trimester after regularly participating in prenatal yoga. These findings indicate that prenatal yoga helps improve both the physical and psychological wellbeing of mothers during pregnancy (Novianti, Supariasa, Setyarini, & Mustafa, 2024). Additionally, a other study found that a combination of prenatal yoga and self-hypnosis is effective in reducing anxiety among pregnant women with preeclampsia. This intervention helps enhance relaxation and emotional stability in high-risk pregnant women (Irawati et al. 2023). Other research also demonstrated that prenatal yoga effectively reduces anxiety in third-trimester pregnant women facing childbirth. Pregnant women who regularly participated in prenatal yoga exhibited lower anxiety levels compared to before the intervention. This indicates that prenatal yoga can serve as an effective non-pharmacological intervention in primary healthcare settings (Kurniawati et al., 2024).

A systematic review and meta-analysis concluded that yoga during pregnancy is effective in reducing anxiety, stress, and depression in pregnant women. Yoga also helps improve sleep quality, emotional balance, and a mother's readiness to face childbirth. The study indicates that prenatal yoga is safe to implement as part of antenatal care (Corrigan, Moran, McGrath, Eustace-Cook, & Daly, 2022). Other research indicates that gentle prenatal yoga is effective in reducing anxiety in both primigravidas and multigravidas. Research by Kiselev (2021) indicates

that yoga can help reduce prenatal stress through mechanisms of nervous system relaxation and regulation of stress hormones (Sulastrri et al., 2021). Additionally, a systematic review found that yoga is one of the most effective non-pharmacological interventions for reducing anxiety during pregnancy, childbirth, and the postpartum period (Domínguez-Solís et al., 2021).

The results of the literature review indicate that prenatal yoga is effective in reducing anxiety levels among pregnant women, particularly during the third trimester. All analyzed articles, demonstrated a reduction in anxiety levels following the implementation of prenatal yoga interventions. These findings suggest that prenatal yoga can serve as an effective non-pharmacological intervention to support maternal mental health in primary healthcare settings. These results align with the study which stated that yoga during pregnancy has a significant impact on reducing anxiety, stress, and depression in pregnant women. Anxiety during pregnancy is a common psychological response resulting from hormonal, physiological, and psychosocial changes experienced by pregnant women (Corrigan et al., 2022). Increased levels of estrogen and progesterone during pregnancy can affect brain neurotransmitters, particularly serotonin and gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA), which play a role in regulating emotions and anxiety (Kiselev, 2021). Additionally, excessive activation of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis (HPA axis) leads to elevated cortisol levels, which are associated with stress and anxiety in pregnant women. If this condition persists, it can impact the health of both the mother and the fetus, such as increased blood pressure, sleep disturbances, preterm labor, and postpartum depression (Domínguez-Solís et al., 2021).

According to a other study primigravida pregnant women tend to experience higher levels of anxiety compared to multigravida women because they lack prior experience with the childbirth process. Additionally, a lack of family support and information regarding pregnancy can also increase maternal anxiety during the antenatal period (Hasibuan et al., 2024). According to Mercer's maternal adaptation theory, pregnancy is a psychological transition process requiring the mother's ability to adapt to the role change of becoming a mother. If this adaptation

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process does not proceed smoothly, pregnant women may experience anxiety and emotional instability. Prenatal yoga supports this adaptation process by enhancing self-awareness, relaxation, and emotional regulation, thereby helping mothers become mentally better prepared to face childbirth (Mercer, 2021).

The findings in this literature review align with mind-body intervention theory, which states that a combination of light physical activity, breath control, meditation, and relaxation can have positive effects on the body's physiological and psychological balance. According to another study, prenatal yoga works by stimulating the parasympathetic nervous system, thereby helping to reduce sympathetic nervous system activity associated with stress. Activation of the parasympathetic nervous system leads to a decrease in heart rate, a reduction in blood pressure, and an increase in feelings of relaxation and comfort in pregnant women (Corrigan et al., 2022). Other research indicates that relaxation activities such as yoga can help increase parasympathetic nervous system activity and reduce cortisol levels in pregnant women. Lower cortisol levels are associated with reduced stress and anxiety, thereby having a positive effect on the health of both the mother and the fetus. Additionally, yoga is known to increase the production of dopamine and serotonin, which play a role in improving mood and psychological well-being in pregnant women.

Other research demonstrates that prenatal yoga effectively reduces anxiety in third-trimester pregnant women through relaxation techniques and breath control. Breathing techniques in yoga help improve tissue oxygenation and enhance blood circulation, thereby promoting physical relaxation. The study found a reduction in anxiety scores after pregnant women regularly participated in prenatal yoga for four weeks (Utami & Zolekhah, 2021). These findings are supported by other research, which noted that yoga practice can lower cortisol levels and increase alpha wave activity in the brain, a state associated with relaxation and emotional calmness (Kiselev, 2021).

In addition to reducing psychological anxiety, prenatal yoga also provides physiological benefits for pregnant women. A study by others showed that prenatal yoga can improve physical comfort in pregnant women through stretching exercises and body postures that help reduce back pain, muscle tension,

and sleep disturbances (Novianti et al., 2024). Another study also found that pregnant women who participated in prenatal yoga experienced improved sleep quality and reduced physical tension as they approached childbirth. A more comfortable physical state indirectly contributes to a reduction in anxiety levels among pregnant women (Kurniawati et al., 2024). The results of another study indicate that prenatal yoga is effective in improving sleep quality in pregnant women. Sleep disturbances during pregnancy are often associated with increased anxiety and physical discomfort. Yoga exercises help improve sleep quality through muscle relaxation and regulation of breathing rhythms, thereby helping the body to relax. Good sleep quality contributes to emotional stability and reduced anxiety in pregnant women (Gencer, Özkan, Vardar, & Serçekuş, 2022).

The findings of a study indicate that a combination of prenatal yoga and self-hypnosis yields better results in reducing anxiety among pregnant women with preeclampsia. The study explains that multimodal relaxation techniques have a synergistic effect on the emotional stability of pregnant women. Self-hypnosis helps increase positive thoughts and reduce negative thoughts regarding childbirth, while yoga helps reduce physical and psychological tension. These findings suggest that prenatal yoga can be applied not only during normal pregnancies but also for high-risk pregnant women under the supervision of healthcare professionals. The results of the study concluded that prenatal yoga is effective in reducing anxiety, stress, and depression during pregnancy. The meta-analysis explained that yoga has a positive effect on maternal mental health through increased production of endorphins and serotonin, which play a role in creating feelings of comfort, calm, and happiness. Additionally, yoga improves sleep quality and enhances mothers' coping abilities in dealing with changes during pregnancy. These findings are supported by those who state that yoga is one of the most effective nonpharmacological interventions compared to standard education or simple relaxation exercises. It was found that yoga has an advantage because it combines physical, mental, and spiritual aspects simultaneously. This combination enables pregnant women to better control their emotions, enhance body awareness, and strengthen their mental readiness for childbirth. Furthermore,

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group activities in prenatal yoga provide social support for pregnant women, which can help reduce fear and anxiety during pregnancy (Corrigan et al., 2022).

Other research also indicates that prenatal yoga helps enhance the emotional bond between mother and fetus (maternal-fetal attachment). Meditation and mindfulness exercises in yoga help mothers focus more on their physical condition and fetal development, thereby fostering positive feelings throughout pregnancy. This enhanced emotional bond is known to help reduce fear and anxiety leading up to childbirth. In addition to psychological benefits, prenatal yoga also provides physiological benefits to the expectant mother's musculoskeletal and cardiovascular systems (Wu, Meehan, Rijlaarsdam, Maughan, Fearon, & Barker, 2022). According to other research stretching and postural exercises in prenatal yoga help improve posture, increase pelvic flexibility, reduce lower back pain, and improve blood circulation during pregnancy. A more comfortable physical condition can help pregnant women feel more relaxed and confident in facing childbirth (Beddoe & Lee, 2008).

A study in Indonesia found that pregnant women who regularly practiced prenatal yoga had lower anxiety levels compared to a group that received only standard antenatal education. The study also noted that prenatal yoga helps boost a mother's confidence in facing a normal delivery (Kusumawati et al., 2023). According to neuroendocrine theory, yoga practice can stimulate the release of endorphins, known as "feel-good hormones." Endorphins help reduce pain perception, enhance comfort, and create a relaxing effect on the body. This explains why pregnant women who practice prenatal yoga regularly tend to have more stable psychological conditions and lower anxiety levels (Field, 2021).

A systematic review also states that prenatal yoga is one of the safest complementary therapies during pregnancy when performed according to the stage of pregnancy and the mother's health condition. Yoga carries a very low risk of side effects compared to pharmacological interventions, making it suitable for implementation in primary healthcare as part of integrated antenatal care (Hall, Foster, & White, 2023). Additionally, a other study showed that conducting group prenatal yoga classes at community

health centers provides the added benefit of social support among pregnant women. Social interaction during yoga activities helps mothers share experiences, boost motivation, and reduce fear of childbirth. Such social support is known to have a positive impact on maternal mental health (Rahmawati, Fitriani, & Andini, 2024).

Other research indicates that pregnant women who regularly practice prenatal yoga experience a significant reduction in anxiety and stress scores compared to the control group. The study also found improved quality of life and psychological readiness for childbirth in the prenatal yoga intervention group. Theoretically, prenatal yoga works not only on the physical aspect but also on the psychological, social, and spiritual aspects of pregnant women. The combination of breathing exercises, relaxation, meditation, and gentle body movements helps create a balance between body and mind (mind-body balance). This condition helps pregnant women become calmer, more comfortable, and better prepared to face the childbirth process both physiologically and psychologically (Li, Zhang, & Chen, 2025).

Prenatal yoga has great potential to be implemented as part of integrated antenatal care within the framework of primary health care. Prenatal yoga is relatively easy to perform, safe, low-cost, and does not require special equipment, making it suitable for implementation at community health centers and antenatal clinics. Prenatal yoga classes can also serve as a medium for health education and social support for pregnant women. Good social support is known to boost mothers' self-confidence and reduce anxiety during pregnancy (Corrigan et al., 2022).

Overall, the results of this literature review indicate that prenatal yoga is effective in reducing anxiety levels in pregnant women through physiological and psychological mechanisms. Prenatal yoga helps reduce stress hormones, enhance relaxation, improve physical comfort, and boost mothers' mental readiness for childbirth. Therefore, prenatal yoga can be recommended as a non-pharmacological intervention that can be integrated into primary healthcare services to improve maternal mental health and the quality of life for pregnant women.

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CONCLUSION

Prenatal yoga is an effective, safe, and easily implementable non-pharmacological intervention in primary healthcare to help reduce anxiety levels in pregnant women. Prenatal yoga can be recommended as part of integrated antenatal care to support maternal mental health and improve the quality of life for pregnant women.

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