

The Effectiveness of a Six-Week Yoga Intervention on Body Awareness, Warnings of Relapse, and Emotion Regulation among Incarcerated Females

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Abstract : Introduction: The incarceration of people with mental illness and substance use disorders is a major public health issue, with social, clinical, and economic implications. Yoga participation has been associated with numerous psychological benefits; however, there is a paucity of research examining impacts of yoga with incarcerated populations. The purpose of this study was to evaluate effectiveness of a six-week yoga intervention on several mental health-related variables, including emotion regulation, body awareness, and warnings of substance relapse among incarcerated females. Methods: This study utilized a pre-post, three-arm design, with participants assigned to intervention, therapeutic community, or general population groups. A between-groups analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted across groups to assess intervention effectiveness using the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS), Scale of Body Connection (SBC), and Warnings of Relapse (AWARE) Questionnaire. Results: ANCOVA results for warnings of relapse (AWARE) revealed significant between-group differences $F(2, 80) = 7.15, p = .001; \eta^2 = .152$, with significant pairwise comparisons between the intervention group and both the therapeutic community ($p = .001$) and the general population ($p = .005$) groups. Similarly, significant differences were found for emotional regulation (DERS) $F(2, 83) = 10.521, p = .000; \eta^2 = .278$. Pairwise comparisons indicated a significant difference between the intervention and general population ($p = .01$). Finally, significant differences between the intervention and control groups were found for body awareness (SBC) $F(2, 84) = 3.69, p = .029; \eta^2 = .081$. Between-group differences were clarified via pairwise comparisons, indicating significant differences between the intervention group and both the therapeutic community ($p = .028$) and general population groups ($p = .020$). Implications: Study results suggest that yoga may be an effective addition to integrative mental health and substance use treatment for incarcerated women, and contributes to increasing evidence that holistic interventions may be an important component for treatment with this population. Specifically, given the prevalence of mental health and substance use disorders, findings revealed that changes in body awareness and emotion regulation may be particularly beneficial for incarcerated populations with substance use challenges as a result of yoga participation. From a systemic perspective, this proactive approach may have long-term implications for both physical and psychological well-being for the incarcerated population as a whole, thereby decreasing the need for traditional treatment. By integrating a more holistic, salutogenic model that emphasizes prevention, interventions like yoga may work to improve the wellness of this population, while providing an alternative or complementary treatment option for those with current symptoms.

Keywords : yoga, mental health, incarceration, wellness

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