

GNYACSM Abstract

Acute Effect of Yoga on Psychological Health Changes Following Chronic Yoga

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ABSTRACT

Yoga practice is rising as an important health behavior lifestyle used to achieve mental wellbeing. Yoga as a method for improving people's psychological health has been validated in various published research. However, the chronic impact of Yoga practice on urban, ethnically-diverse minority undergraduate students has not yet been examined.

PURPOSE: The current study assessed the acute impacts of a yoga session following a semester-long yoga intervention on the mental health of ethnically-diverse undergraduate students.

METHODS: Forty six students (mean age = 24.6 ± 7.7 years) participated in either a 14-week yoga program or a no-exercise (reading) control group over the course of a single semester (chronic practice) at York College in Jamaica, Queens. Acute effects (before vs. after one session) of yoga ($n = 22$) relative to a control group ($n = 24$) were assessed twice, during the first and last sessions of the program. Mental health was assessed using self-report measures from the NIH Toolbox. Separate 2 (session; T1/T2) x 2 (semester; beginning/end) x 2 (group; yoga/control) mixed factorial ANOVAs were conducted for each dependent measure to assess the acute and chronic effects of yoga on psychological health, as well as the interaction between the two.

RESULTS: There were statistically significant post session ($p < .05$) reductions in anger and both affective and somatic symptoms of anxiety showing the beneficial effects of engaging in a 75-min quiet mindful activity (yoga, reading). Yoga group demonstrated a higher acute percent reduction at the end of the semester compared to the beginning of the semester compared to control. The yoga group demonstrated significant post session ($p < .05$) reductions in perceived stress and sadness however with no change in percent reductions between the beginning and end of the semester.

CONCLUSION: These findings indicate that quiet mindful activities lead to significant psychological health improvements. The effect is more pronounced with long term yoga practice for anger and anxiety, suggesting a dose-response relationship. The acute effect of yoga on stress and sadness did not change over time.