Development of a yoga program for police personnel

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Growing research continues to demonstrate the applicability and utility of yoga to address stress and trauma related conditions, as well as other physical and mental health concerns. Despite the popularity of yoga, many barriers to practice remain, including cultural barriers related to perceptions of yoga and yoga practitioners. Populations that may benefit most from yoga interventions may not have access or deem yoga appropriate for them.

The current study focused on developing a yoga-based program for police personnel that was culturally appropriate and able to integrate within a department structure. The study was conducted in two phases. In Phase I, quantitative data that examined demographics, perceived stress, and current self-care practices including yoga was collected from 61 participants: 29 civilians and 32 officers. Qualitative data collection occurred in Phase II and consisted of focus groups and key informant interviews with seven officers in leadership positions, six detectives, five patrol officers, two records staff personnel, and three evidence technicians. Seven primary themes emerged from qualitative data: Perceptions and experience with yoga, Barriers and facilitators to practice, Cultural adaptation of practice, Benefits of yoga, Police work and culture, Self-care practices, and Relationships.

The collected information was incorporated into the creation of a time-limited yoga protocol for the police department. It was open to all department staff and adaptable to the skill level of participants. Due to the nature of police work and high frequency of work related injury, intensive prop use was encouraged to make the practice accessible while simultaneously maintaining a healthy balance between challenge and ease. The protocol was further guided by Trauma Informed Yoga principles.