



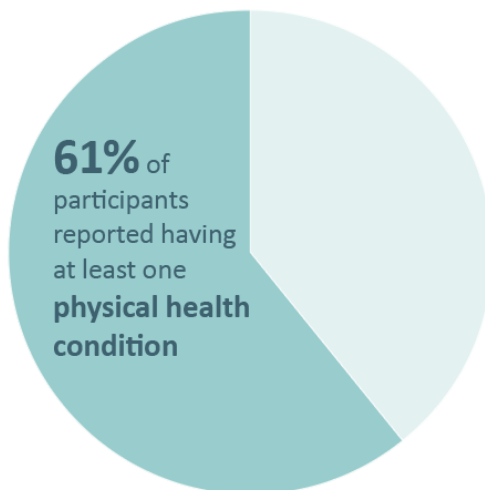
WHAT DID WE STUDY AND WHO PARTICIPATED?

Reaching Out with Yoga (ROWY) was a 5-year collaborative project between the BC Society of Transition Houses and Yoga Outreach. The ROWY research project looked at how participating in trauma-informed yoga (TIY)¹ can impact the health and well-being of women, children and youth who have experienced violence, and of front-line staff working in the anti-violence sector in British Columbia. This report shares the key findings from the **front-line anti-violence staff participants**.

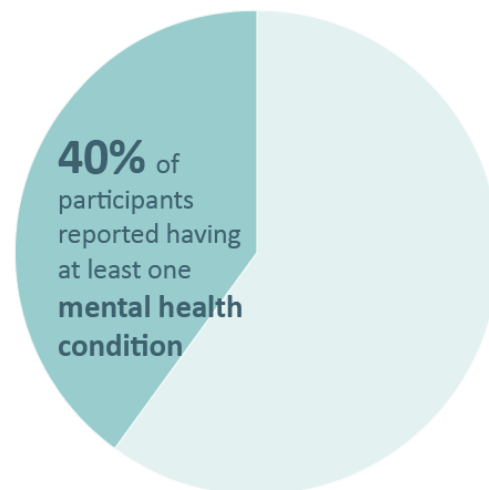
236 front-line anti-violence staff participated in the Reaching Out with Yoga research project.

- Their **average age** was 44 (ranged from 21-75)
- Their **experience in the sector** ranged from:
 - 39% less than 5 years
 - 18% 5-10 years
 - 25% 11-20 years
 - 18% more than 20 years

Before participating in the workshop



The most common were **muscle, joint problems** (44%); **cardiovascular** (14%); and **arthritis** (11%)



The most common were **anxiety** (52%) and **depression** (28%)

¹ Trauma-informed yoga adapts traditional yoga techniques for the specific health and safety needs of individuals. Yoga teachers trained in trauma-informed yoga provide simple, clear instruction, using invitational (rather than directive) language and offer variations to the postures. It uses breathing, mindfulness and movement practices to reduce the impacts of trauma by focusing on choice, empowerment and safety.



HOW DID WE STUDY TRAUMA-INFORMED YOGA FOR FRONT-LINE ANTI-VIOLENCE STAFF?

Front-line anti-violence staff who worked at one of the 21 ROWY project sites (Transition and Second Stage Houses in BC) were invited to participate in a half-day Using Yoga in Your Work™ (UYiYW) workshop. In this workshop, trainers delivered grounding, breathing and movement techniques to support front-line staff's self-care and to offer skills and techniques they could use with the women, children and youth they support.

Staff completed a baseline survey before the workshop, then a follow-up survey 6 months after the workshop. The surveys asked questions about their health, experiences of yoga, and their current stress levels and coping techniques. Staff were also invited to participate in an interview at the end of their participation in the research project to share their experiences.

WHERE DID THE PROJECT TAKE PLACE?





WHAT DID WE FIND OUT ABOUT TRAUMA-INFORMED YOGA FOR FRONT-LINE ANTI-VIOLENCE STAFF?



Overall, the staff who participated in the UYIYW workshop enjoyed it. Participants felt it was a great reminder to take care of themselves; they learned new skills for grounding, relaxation and chair yoga; and, they felt they gained some useful tools for their work with the women, children and youth who they support.

Staff participants reported an increase in physical activity in the past 2 weeks that approaches statistical significance. None of the physical and mental states (i.e., *pain/discomfort in body, intrusive thoughts, sleep difficulties, anger/irritability/jumpy, difficulty having positive feelings, feelings of hopelessness, appetite changes, and, thinking of yourself or others negatively*) show statistically significant changes. One reason for this may be that mental and physical states of staff were, and remained, predominantly good. Changes, if any, tended to be small.

When asked about their experiences of the Using Yoga in Your Work™ workshop, staff reported the **usefulness of the skills and techniques learned for their work**, both in their work with women, children and youth as well as for themselves.

"I DEFINITELY DO BREATHING AND GROUNDING ACTIVITIES. NOT QUITE IN THE MIDDLE OF A CRISIS USUALLY, BUT SOMETHING WILL HAPPEN THAT'S DISTURBING, LIKE A LOT OF CONFLICT MIGHT BE GOING ON BETWEEN THE CLIENTS, YELLING AND SWEARING. AND WHEN IT'S OVER I'LL COME INTO MY OFFICE AND SHUT THE DOOR AND JUST SIT WITH MY FEET ON THE GROUND, AND TAKE SOME DEEP BREATHS AND JUST FOCUS ON BEING CALM AND BEING PRESENT. ALSO, OFTEN BEFORE MEETING WITH A CLIENT, WHEN I KNOW IT COULD BE A DIFFICULT MEETING, I TRY TO GET GROUNDED AND BE REALLY PRESENT SO THAT I CAN BE PRESENT FOR THE PERSON I'M MEETING WITH."



"IT GAVE ME MORE SKILLS THAT I CAN USE WITH MY CLIENTS. IT ALSO GAVE ME A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF YOGA, TRAUMA, AND HOW THEY CAN INTERSECT AND JUST THE BENEFITS THAT ARE INVOLVED, RIGHT? AND SOME OF THE OUT OF THE BOX THINKING THAT WE CAN USE WHEN WE'RE DEALING WITH PEOPLE WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED TRAUMA. LIKE IT'S NOT A ONE SIZE FITS ALL, AND HERE'S JUST ANOTHER TOOL THAT CAN BE USED. AND I THINK THAT'S LIKE, AMAZING."

"REALLY GREAT, BOTH FOR CLIENTS AND US. BEFORE WE SERIOUSLY STARTED THE YOGA WE SOMETIMES STRUGGLED WITH THE TOOLS TO HELP CLIENTS GROUND THEMSELVES AND OURSELVES IN OUR WORK. THE YOGA HAS BEEN VERY HELPFUL IN MODELING EMPOWERING LANGUAGE AND IN PROVIDING THESE GROUNDING SKILLS."

Staff also reported that the techniques were **useful for their lives outside of work**, and shared some experiences of when they had used the grounding and breathing techniques in stressful situations, personally or with family.

"AT HOME SOMETIMES IF I'M GOING THROUGH A STRESSFUL PERIOD, THE BREATHING EXERCISES ARE BIG."

Staff reported appreciating the **accessibility of the style of yoga** that was offered, and that they could incorporate it into their day-to-day lives.

"JUST KNOWING THAT I CAN TAKE FIVE MINUTES AND DO YOGA NO MATTER WHERE I'M AT — IN MY CHAIR, AT WORK, AT SCHOOL, WHEREVER IT NEEDS TO BE DONE."

Some staff reported **limitations** and barriers to their ability to continue to use the skills they learned.

"IT'S VERY EASY FOR ME TO FORGET ABOUT THESE SORTS OF THINGS AND JUST LET THE WORK SATURATE MY MIND. BUT I DO THINK IT'S VERY BENEFICIAL."



INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE?

As part of the Reaching Out with Yoga project, a number of resources were developed to share the useful tools and practices and enhance the sustainability of the project. Please see the [BCSTH website](https://www.bccsthsociety.org/) for access to free downloadable resources, online trauma-informed yoga videos, and links to more learning.

Visit yogaoutreach.com to find out information about booking a UYiYW workshop or starting a yoga program at your agency.

Using Yoga at Work

We invite you to experiment and find ways of incorporating breathing, mindfulness, grounding techniques and chair-based movement in your everyday work. You are welcome to choose which movements you try, how long you hold them, and when you take rest.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We want to acknowledge and thank all of the amazing Transition and Second Stage House Program staff, and PEACE Program counsellors for taking on the role of community based researchers off the side of their desk and for participating in the UYiYW workshop. And thank you to all of the women, children and youth who participated in the yoga classes. Thank you for your support, assistance and participation in making the ROWY project a success. We couldn't have done it without you!

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