

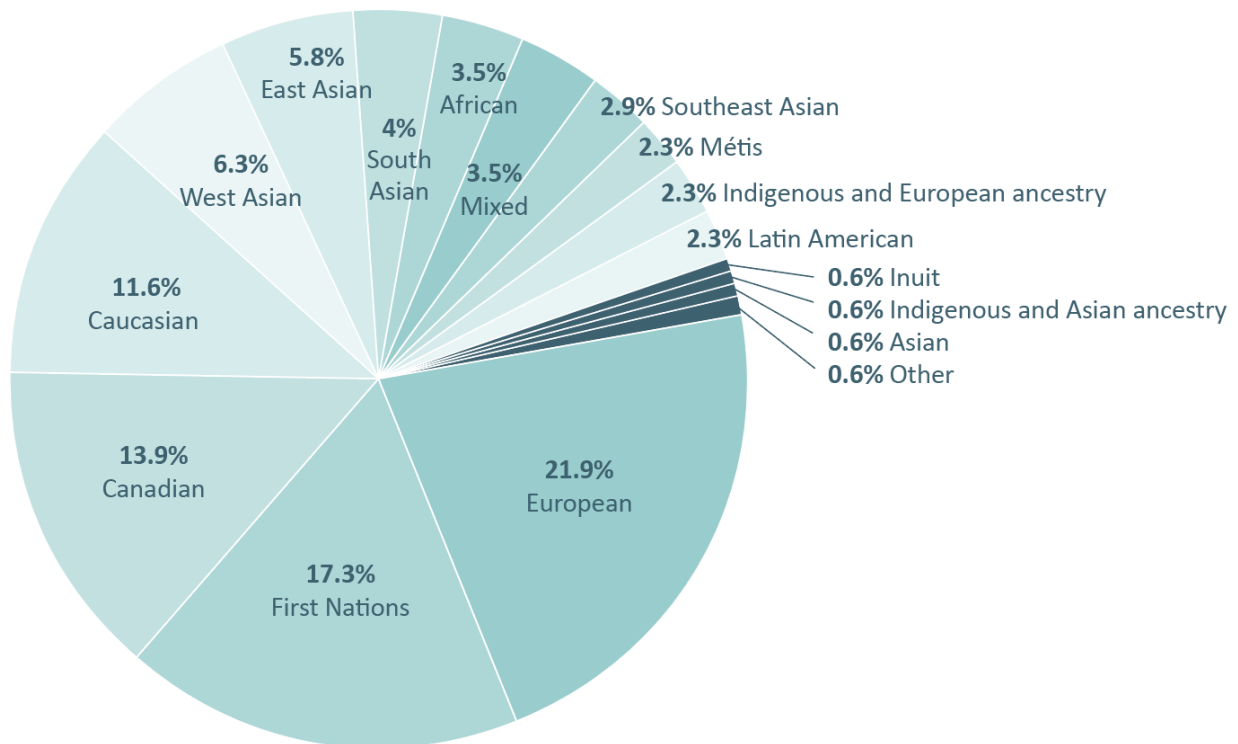


## WHAT DID WE STUDY AND WHO PARTICIPATED?

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)<sup>1</sup> 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 **women participants**.

212 women with experiences of violence participated in the Reaching Out with Yoga research project.

- Their **average age** was 41 (ranged from 16-68)
- Their **cultural identity** is reflected in the graph below:



<sup>1</sup> 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.

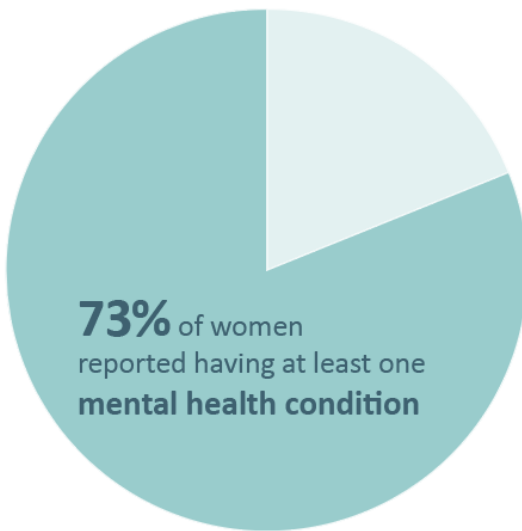


## HOW DID WE STUDY TRAUMA-INFORMED YOGA IN TRANSITION HOUSES?

Women who were accessing services from Transition and Second Stage House programs in BC were invited to participate in 4 or more trauma-informed yoga sessions. Women completed surveys before and after they participated in the yoga classes. The surveys asked questions about their health, experience of yoga, stress and coping. They were also invited to participate in an interview at the end of their participation in the project to share their experiences.



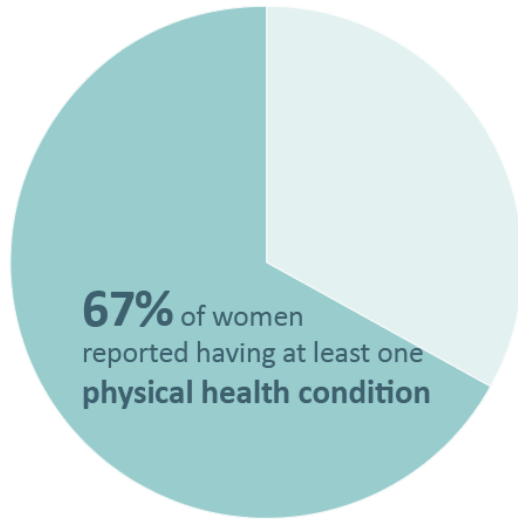
The surveys and interview questions asked participants about **demographics, physical and mental health status, physical activity levels, impressions of the yoga classes, and overall experience** of being involved in the project.



Before participating in the TIY yoga program...

**73% of women reported having at least one mental health condition.**

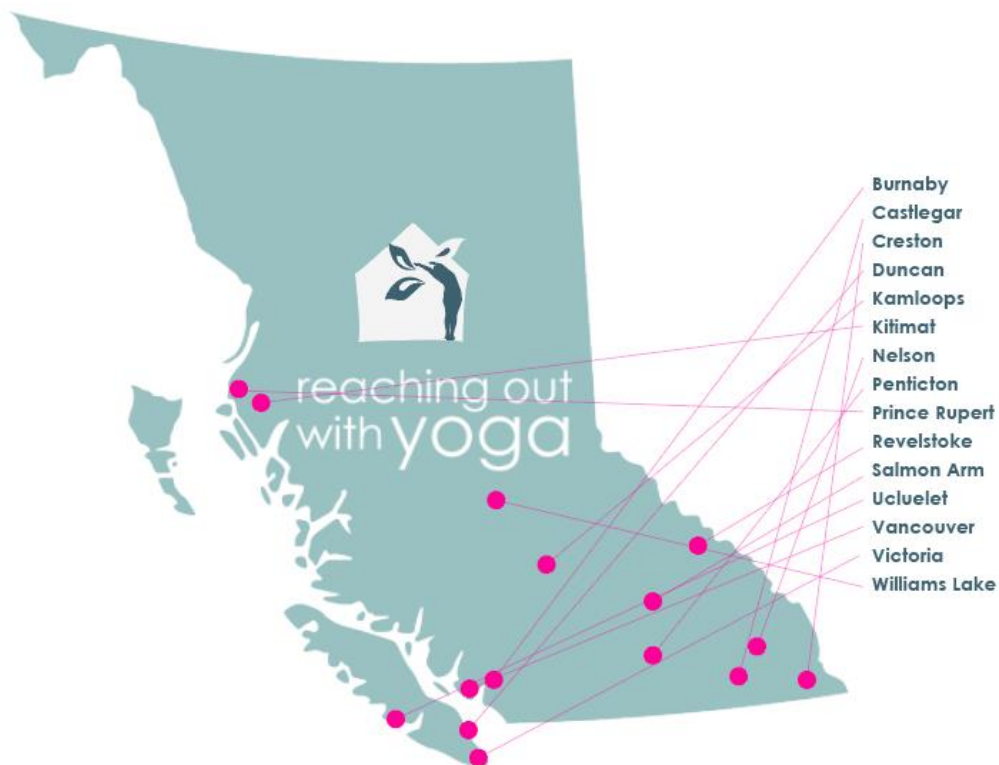
The most common were **anxiety (50%), depression (48%) and PTSD (22%).**



**67% of women reported having at least one physical health condition.**

The most common were **muscle/joint problems** (37%), **chronic pain** (18%) and **arthritis** (7%).

## WHERE DID THE PROJECT TAKE PLACE?





## WHAT DID WE FIND OUT ABOUT TRAUMA-INFORMED YOGA FOR WOMEN WITH EXPERIENCES OF VIOLENCE?

### 1) Women's stress symptoms decreased



Slight decrease in **pain/discomfort in body**  
Slight decrease in **self-medication/drug/alcohol use**  
Significant decrease in **memories/intrusive thoughts**  
Significant decrease in **sleep difficulties**  
Significant decrease in **fear/worry/being on-guard or jumpy**  
Significant decrease in **feelings of disinterest/detachment**  
Significant decrease in **appetite changes**  
Significant decrease in **negative thoughts**  
(*about self or others*)

*"I WAS VERY PARALYSED BY DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY AND COMING HERE EACH WEEK HELPED ME TO CALM MY BODY, WHICH CALMED MY MIND... WHICH HAS HELPED ME TO REACH OUT FOR SUPPORT IN SEEING A PSYCHIATRIST, TO GET ON STRONGER ANTI-DEPRESSANTS, TO GOING TO INDIVIDUAL COUNSELLING, TO GOING TO THE WEEKLY DROP-IN WITH THE WOMEN IN TRANSITION. SO IT WASN'T THAT THE YOGA FIXED ANYTHING THAT'S BEEN CAUSING ME DIFFICULTY IN MY LIFE, IT JUST MAYBE BROKE ME FREE OF THE PARALYSIS THAT I WAS EXPERIENCING, IF THAT MAKES SENSE? AND MAYBE EACH OF THESE THINGS HELPED WITH THAT, HELPED ME STEP FORWARD."*

### 2) Women were more physically active (outside of the yoga classes)

Women reported an increase in the amount of physical activity they were doing from before to after their participation in the ROWY program. This is likely due to a number of factors, one of which is possibly related to having positive experiences in their bodies and therefore wanting to continue that feeling.



### 3) Women enjoyed the yoga classes

Many women noted that they hadn't had positive experiences with yoga previously and that these classes were much more approachable and enjoyable.



- **"I enjoyed the yoga class"**  
89% answered **strongly agree**
- **"I plan to continue** attending or doing yoga on my own"  
92% answered **strongly agree**
- **"I feel better (mood)** than before class"  
79% answered **strongly agree**
- **"My mind feels clearer and calmer** than before class."  
84% answered **strongly agree**

The positive ratings also increased over time showing not only positive impressions, but also an enhancement of those impressions over time.

*"I CAN'T BELIEVE HOW MUCH IT HELPS REGULATE MY THOUGHTS AND FOCUS. IT HAS BECOME AN IMPORTANT PART OF MY ROUTINE."*

*"WHEN I LEAVE I FEEL MORE POSITIVE AND MY BRAIN IS NOT RACING IN ALL DIRECTIONS."*



This is a promising outcome and indicates that TIY-based yoga practices, in combination with the support women receive from the anti-violence organizations, can be **positive and impactful**.

*"I FEEL MORE IN MY BODY AND DISSOCIATING LESS, RELIEF FROM PAIN, IMPROVED STRENGTH AND FLEXIBILITY, AND DEFINITELY NOTICED MY MOOD TO BE SIGNIFICANTLY CALMER AND LIGHTER AFTER CLASS."*

*"IT'S MADE ME MORE MINDFUL. IT'S MADE ME CARE ABOUT MY BODY MORE IN SO MANY WAYS. IT'S MADE ME WANT TO LIKE, TAKE MY HEALING FURTHER, AND IT'S MADE ME JUST WANT TO BE MORE AT PEACE IN GENERAL. LIKE I THINK IT HAS A LOT TO DO WITH THAT AND I WAS JUST READY FOR THAT. SO YEAH, I REALLY THINK IT JUST BROUGHT EVERYTHING TOGETHER."*

Women who participated in the research interviews were asked to share their general feelings about the TIY program; what worked and what didn't work for them; how they might be using the skills they learned; whether they anticipate continuing with yoga; and, suggestions for improvement.

*"I WOULD JUST LIKE TO SAY THAT I FEEL THIS IS SOMETHING THAT SHOULD CONTINUE HERE AND THAT PEOPLE WITH ISSUES NEED SOMETHING HEALTHY TO RELY ON OR FALL BACK ON TO HELP THEM WITH ANXIETY OR TRAUMA. JUST TO BRING PEACE INTO THEIR BODIES, EVEN FOR JUST AN HOUR A WEEK. IT WAS SOMETHING THAT I REALLY LOOKED FORWARD TO EVERY WEEK."*

A majority of the women reported that the yoga impacted their **sleep and relaxation** and their ability to **self-regulate**.

*"IT JUST PROVIDED ME WITH A LITTLE RESPITE FROM THE UNRELENTING ANXIETY"*

Many women shared that they experienced **physical benefits** such as improved flexibility, strength and ability to take part in the different postures more easily.

*"I WAS AMAZED I COULD TOUCH MY TOES...IT INCREASED MY FLEXIBILITY AMAZINGLY"*



A **decrease in pain** was mentioned by some participants, including decreased tension or learning stretches to help with certain neck or back pain.

*"I HAD LESS TENSION AND PAIN...I'M RECOVERING FROM A SURGERY AND HAVE HAD A LOT OF PAIN IN MY BACK AND THIS REALLY HELPED ME RELEASE THAT. I FELT MUCH LESS PAIN PHYSICALLY SINCE TAKING THE CLASS"*

Some women noted a shift in their **mood and mindset** throughout the program including having a more positive outlook or feeling more interested in doing certain activities which had previously been difficult.

*"JUST REFRAMING NEGATIVE THOUGHTS, I DO THAT SEVERAL TIMES A DAY...JUST LETTING THE THOUGHTS OR EMOTIONS COME BUT NOT SO MUCH BEING IMPACTED BY THEM"*

**Social connection** and the benefits they felt from doing something as a group (not feeling that they were alone in their experiences) was also noted as a positive outcome for some women.

*"I FIND THAT WITH WHAT I'M GOING THROUGH, IT'S REALLY NICE TO GET OUT OF THE HOUSE AND TO HAVE DIFFERENT ACTIVITIES, ESPECIALLY WITH OTHER PEOPLE...WE'VE DEVELOPED FRIENDSHIPS, SO THERE'S SOME SOCIAL ASPECT TO THAT AND I THINK THAT'S VERY HELPFUL BECAUSE YOU MEET OTHER PEOPLE WHO ARE GOING THROUGH SIMILAR CIRCUMSTANCES, AND WE'RE ALL GROWING AND LEARNING AND HEALING."*

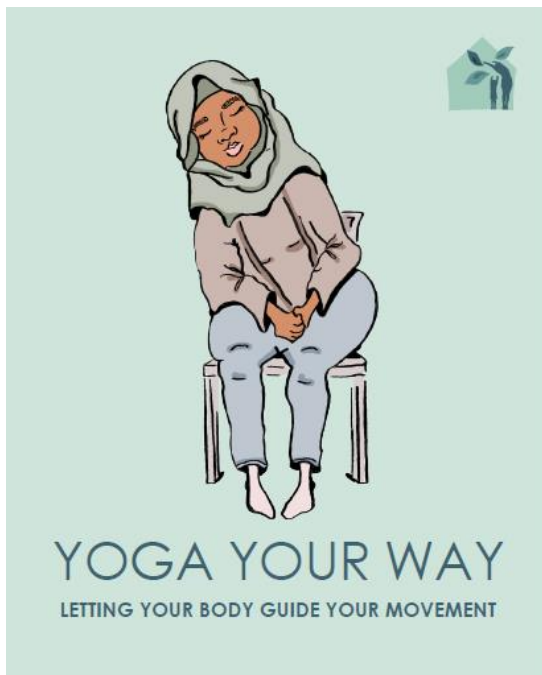
Lastly, the women talked about how this style of yoga was different to what they had experienced before and that it was very **accessible**.

*"SHE DOESN'T TELL US WHAT TO DO, SHE INVITES US TO TRY AND SEE WHAT WORKS FOR US"*



## 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 to enhance the sustainability of the project. Please see the [BCSTH website](#) for access to free downloadable resources, online trauma-informed yoga videos, and links to more learning.



## 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, as well as 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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