

New Study Reveals Benefits of Yoga for People in Addiction Recovery

Some may dismiss yoga as the pastime of yuppies and New Agers, but a recent study produced by the Little Rock-based Better Community Development Inc.'s Hoover Treatment Center shows that yoga has tremendous benefits for people in recovery.

The study, "A Novel Approach to Alternative Integral Practices in African-American Communities Challenged with Substance Abuse," was produced by O'Dell O. Johnson, who served as the primary researcher. Johnson is a consultant for Better Community Development Inc. (BCD) at the Hoover Treatment Center. The Hoover Treatment Center is a 24-hour, comprehensive, intensive residential and outpatient program that addresses the chemical dependency needs of men and women.

The study investigated recurring relapses and high recidivism rates among a sample population of 23 women and men in recovery residing at the Hoover Treatment Center, and sought to determine the effectiveness of integrating mindfulness holistic living practices into a conventional inner-city drug rehabilitation program.

For a five-week period, the study was conducted in a predominately African American community in Little Rock. The study noted that "substance abuse relapse is forever recycling because of the magnitude of the disconnect malfunction, and dysfunction of mind, body, and spirit." More than 90 persons were interviewed over a three-month period for the study.

The purpose of mindful holistic training was to enhance conventional drug treatment approaches by implementing alternative medicine in at-risk communities. Johnson, who once struggled with chemical dependency, led the training that integrated mindfulness holistic living into the Alcohol Anonymous' Twelve-Step Program. The approach involves the practice of meditation, yoga, reiki (the calming of the mind and body), and nutritional alternatives.

"According to alternative-based research, alternative practices can assist those who are challenged with substance abuse issues," the study stated. "Alternative practices such as yoga, meditation, reiki, ayurveda, and alternative nutrition have shown promising results in helping sustained sobriety."

The study cited that former substance abusers who practice yoga say that yoga fosters the kind of discipline and self-peace needed in a 12-Step

program. "That is because yoga forces one's mind and body to work in perfect harmony," it noted.

Since mindful holistic living is not as widely practiced by African Americans compared to whites, the researcher was surprised that 98 percent of the participants received the training positively. Of participants who were initially resistant to the holistic mindful approach to their recovery, after they understood how it relates to the environment and community, they gradually embraced the approach.

"At first there was some resistance to it because we were not talking about Jesus," said Johnson in an interview about the study. So Johnson modified the yoga pose stretches and mantras to fit their beliefs. "Yoga makes you feel better, so we talked about the spirit. We changed the language and showed the healthy benefits.... During stillness time, the mantra would be 'Amen. Amen. Amen'."

The study concluded that in order for mindfulness integration to become sustainable and successful in the lives of the recovering addict, there must be training that transcends into family, community, and spiritual practices.

Overall, the study stated that integrating alternative practices into 12-Steps recovery offers "great advantages" to the healing process for African Americans in recovery.

For more information on Better Community Development, Inc., please visit bcdinc.org and O'Dell Johnson's transpersonal life coach consulting visit pathwaysintohealing.com. To learn more about Johnson's approach to mindful holistic living, please visit chopra.com/namaste.