

BECOMING AWARE OF YOUR BODY

A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON YOGA FOR CHRONIC NECK PAIN PATIENTS

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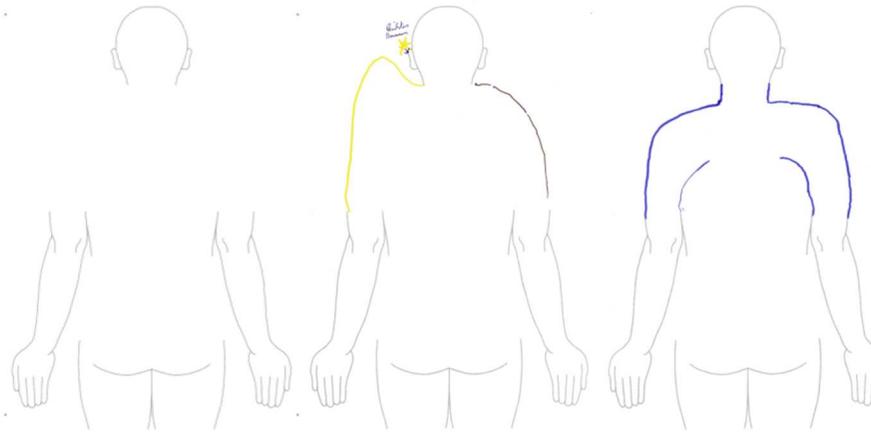
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Open-Minded

INTRODUCTION

Chronic neck pain can distort body perception. The aim of this qualitative study was to investigate perceived changes in body perception and psychosocial aspects in chronic neck pain patients after participating in a yoga program.

Figure 1: Empty drawing (left); one patient's drawing before (middle) and after (right) the yoga program. The patient described a reduction of predominance of pain in body perception.



METHODS

Eighteen patients with chronic non-specific neck pain participated in a 9-week yoga-program. Before and after the program, patients completed a drawing of their neck and shoulder region in a way that reflects their subjective body perception (Figure 1). Semi-standardized interviews were used to retrieve more information on body perception, emotional status, every-day life and coping and changes in these dimensions after attendance of the program. Analysis was based on the content analysis approach.

RESULTS

Patients reported changes on 5 fundamental dimensions of human experience:

- 1) On the **physical dimension**, patients mainly reported a renewed body awareness and body mindfulness (Figure 1).
"I believe that the connection between my mind and body has been strengthened somehow."
- 2) On the **cognitive dimension**, patients mainly described increased perceived control over their health.
"I'm more aware about the association between my own actions and the way I feel... that you can change a lot yourself."
- 3) On the **emotional dimension**, patients reported particularly acceptance of their pain and life's burden.
"It's OK, [my neck] is a part of me, even if it hurts a bit once in a while... But I'm not a robot. Yes, it's OK just the way it is."
- 4) On the **behavioral dimension**, patients reported the enhanced use of active coping strategies.
"I notice, when the pain increases that, I know for example that this half forward bend, that is now like a painkiller for me."
- 5) On the **social dimension**, patients particularly described a renewed participation in active life.
"That I'm not disabled in my daily routines any more. That I could meet my friends, or go to the cinema without having pain."

CONCLUSIONS

Yoga induced changes on a wide range of experiential dimensions in patients with chronic neck pain. Patients perceived yoga as helpful in coping with their pain; they described a more internal locus of health control and increased perceived self-efficacy. Thereby, active coping with the pain became possible. Increased pain acceptance and decreased overall symptoms allowed for a more active participation in daily life. Body awareness and body mindfulness seem to be key mechanisms of these changes.

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