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Experiential accounts of pregnant women with self-reported symptoms of PTSD, who do yoga

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Abstract

The vulnerability of the foetus, infant and developing child to maternal mental illness, the inter-generational impact of trauma, and the beneficial and healing effect of yoga and meditation on aspects of trauma is well-documented. However, there are no studies on the intersection between PTSD, yoga and meditation, and pregnancy. This study explores the experiences of seven participants who do eight weeks of yoga and meditation in their second trimester of pregnancy, and any impact on their self-reported symptoms of PTSD. The importance of trauma research is evident given the high exposure to trauma of women in South Africa, the likely high numbers of South African pregnant women with symptoms of PTSD, the evidence of heightened vulnerability to aspects of PTSD in pregnancy, and the accompanying long-term effects in infancy, childhood, and adolescence. The impact of doing yoga and meditation as a beneficial intervention for PTSD during pregnancy was explored. The study used a qualitative and longitudinal study design with exploratory case studies, and participants were selected using purposive sampling. Data from semi-structured interviews was gathered at four different time periods: three during pregnancy, and the fourth after birth. Further data sets consisted of recordings from the yoga and meditation sessions, journaling from participants, and feedback from the yoga and meditation program instructors. Data sets were analysed using Thematic Analysis. All seven participants experienced a reduction in their self-reported symptoms of PTSD during the yoga and meditation program, and these changes persisted beyond the birth of their child. All participants used the tools they had learned to assist them during labour; such tools included chanting, breath practices, visualisation, and meditation. The participants who experienced previous traumatic births used the tools to prevent further re-traumatisation.