

Stigma and Resilience among Individuals Taking Opioid Agonist Therapy with Chronic Pain



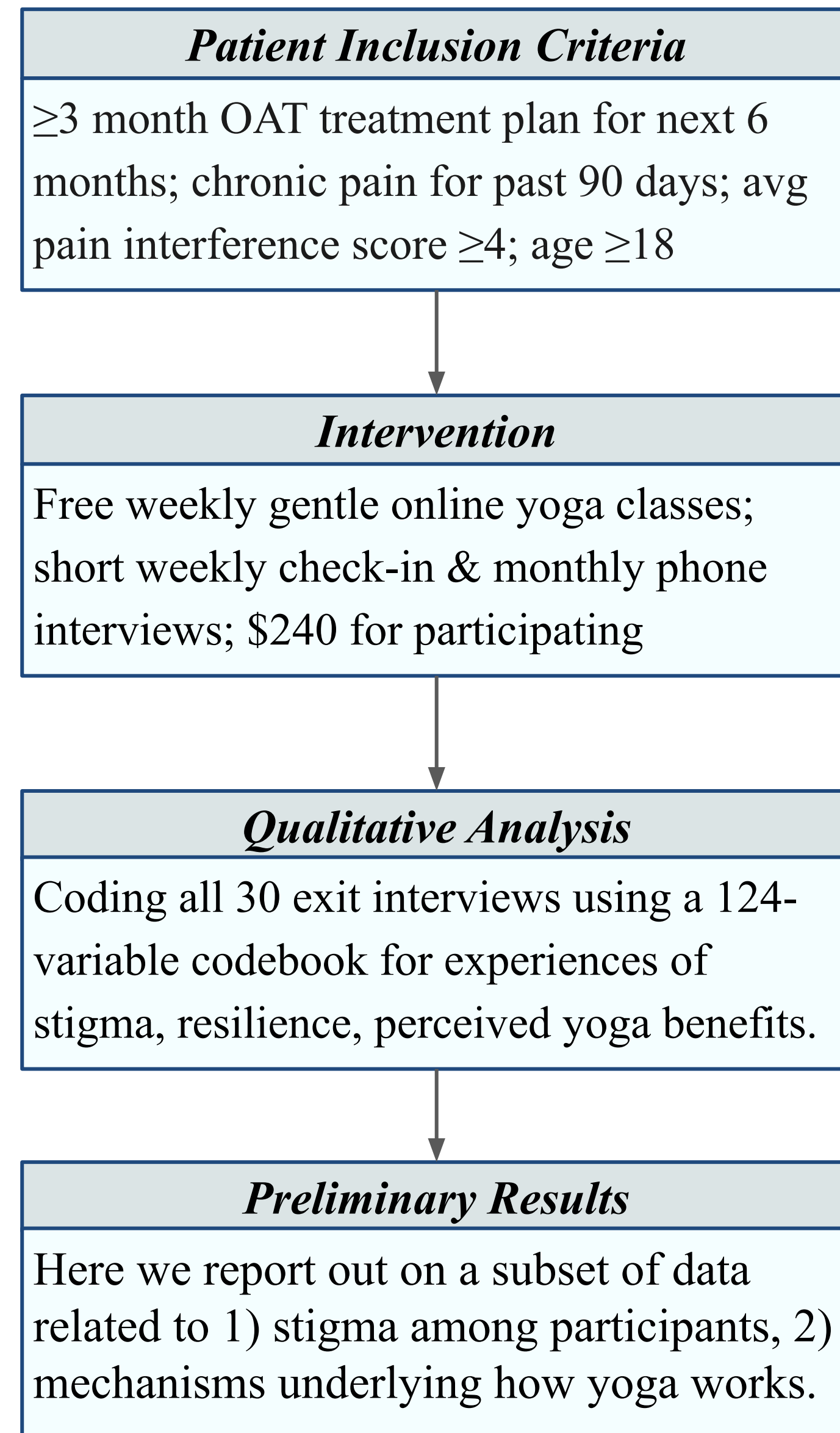
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Background and Aim

- Chronic pain is a relevant experience among those receiving opioid agonist therapy.¹⁻³
- Providers prescribing OAT face systemic barriers: low Medicaid reimbursement, no comprehensive pain management programs.⁵⁻⁶
- Hatha yoga-based interventions, involving “physical postures (*āsanas*), breath control (*prāṇāyāma*), and meditative practices” have been found an effective treatment for chronic pain conditions. Yet adherence in the context of OAT can be a challenge due to common barriers.^{4, 7-9}
- The parent study (Yoga MAT; Medication-Assisted Therapy) examined whether components added to a 12-wk hatha yoga-based intervention addressed barriers and optimized yoga adherence.⁴ (N=29; average age 49.9+10.9 years, 52% women, 10% Multiracial, 38% Black/African American, 48% White)
- This secondary analysis by the 2025 Laidlaw cohort analyzed exit interviews of Yoga MAT participants.

Methods



Results

Representative Quote About Select Stigmatized Experiences
Theme 1. Sex Trade/Work Stigma: ppt reported lifetime sex trade or work, including trade of sexual acts of or sex work for money or good, services
[Sex trade/work] is "Stigmatized and the oldest profession on the planet" (Black, African American Female)
“It's a lot of trauma and shame that you gotta look back on ... you literally cross every line that you ever drew in the sand for yourself.” (White Polish Female)
Theme 2. Dehumanization: stigma is experienced in a manner that deprives a person or group of positive human qualities, personality, or dignity.
“... Days after I gave birth, [gov. agency] is coming into my room saying they're gonna take my child [b/c of OAT]. We know how important it's for a mother and child to bond and you are now gonna rip this child from this mother. You're ... pushing her into postpartum depression ... [I was] doing the right thing. [OAT] shouldn't be seen as a punishment ... [this] sets women up to fail ... perpetuat[es] this circle of trauma.”
“ I was going to a certain hospital that, um, immediately upon seein' tracks on my arms, would treat me like somethin' that should be on the bottom of their shoe. And so, um, I had to leave that hospital” (White Female)
Theme 3. Chronic pain stigma: experiences of chronic pain being stigmatized, including minimization, disbelief, substance use stigma, etc
“Yeah, regular doctors. So if it doesn't show on the x-ray, then it's not legitimate pain, right?” (Biracial Female)
“I'm being treated very unfairly. You know, my doctor thought I was a drug addict, and I wasn't. You know, and I've been suffering with a condition that could have been easily taken care of if she had just believed me that I was in pain.” (White European Female)

Discussion

Results
 Participants reported commonly experiencing multiple forms of stigma related to their experiences (e.g., chronic pain, poverty), parts of themselves (e.g., race, weight), and behaviors (e.g., substance use). Yoga was also reported beneficial for behavioral health across participants.
Theme 1: Sex work/trade stigma appears in different forms and Its effects include increased risk of violence, harassment, and barriers to accessing health / social services. Creating an environment where sex work is not delegitimized as a profession, understanding the differences between sex work and survival sex, and challenging harmful narratives are a step forward in supporting such people.
Theme 2: Dehumanizing treatment because of past substance use or opioid agonist therapy results in being treated as less than and depriving those of positive human qualities, personality, or dignity. Stigmatizers may cause participants to leave treatment centers or separate from loved ones entirely; leading to relapse, hiding treatment, or internalizing the substance use stigma placed on them.
Theme 4: Patients who suffer from chronic pain may experience healthcare providers and others alike disputing the validity of their pain and presuming drug seeking behavior when mentioning opioid agonists therapy. Stigmatizations responses may lead to hiding chronic pain, suffering in silence, depletion of medication, etc

Discussion
 Preliminary results suggest multiple forms of stigma are common among people with OAT. Additionally, participant reports suggest that yoga may help ameliorate concerns commonly reported in this group (reduced negative affect, substance use; improved self-care, trauma coping) that are stigma sequelae. Alongside multilevel efforts to reduce stigma, future research could explore whether yoga may help people cope with the harmful effects of stigma.

Mechanisms of How Yoga Works

Yoga → Less Re-Exp. → Overcome Trauma	Yoga → Self Regulation → Release of Anger	Yoga → Mindfulness → More Self Care	Yoga → Decr in Negative Emotions → Prevents Substance Use
“And when you think about those things, if there was any trauma, your body actually goes through the trauma again as if it's happening again. So, the yoga, it takes me away from that.” (6057)	“yoga in itself is very much like meditation...but it's more of a physical in pushing myself ... it is a release of that anger and everything and just pushing yourself to hold that pose, you know, and just telling yourself you've got to hold it, you know.” (6022)	“when you stop and take the time to do the yoga and get in touch with yourself it's just so different, um, to realize that, you know, um, this is the body that, I'm gonna have and the mind that I'm gonna have for the time that I'm here above ground, and that I need to take care of it” (6016)	“[Instead of] drugs for the stress and not having to deal with things ... when I'm feeling upset or depressed or whatever bad reactions I have, I find other ways to deal with them. And I think, like, yoga helps prevent it from getting to that point. To help let go of it before it gets to that” (6069)