

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

CAM and Energy Psychology Techniques Remediate PTSD Symptoms in Veterans and Spouses

Church, D., & Brooks, A. J. (2013). CAM and energy psychology techniques remediate PTSD symptoms in veterans and spouses. *Explore*, 10(1), 24-33. doi:10.1016/j.explore.2013.10.006

SUMMARY: Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a debilitating disorder affecting many Veterans and their families, and there is a need for evidence-based treatment options for these families. PTSD symptom scores were compared at pre-treatment, post-treatment, and follow-up for Veterans and their spouses attending a week-long therapy retreat for PTSD using several complementary and alternative medicine techniques. PTSD symptoms were significantly reduced for Veterans and spouses following treatment.

KEY FINDINGS:

- There was a significant reduction in PTSD symptoms post-treatment for 54% of Veterans and 26% of spouses.
- Veterans who met PTSD criteria before (83%) and after (28%) the retreat decreased significantly; Spouses who met PTSD criteria before (29%) and after (4%) the retreat also decreased significantly.
- Gains were maintained for Veterans and improved for spouses at the 4-6 week follow-up, when 7% of Veterans and 1% of spouses met criteria for PTSD.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer workshops or classes for military families that integrate the use of complementary and alternative medicine techniques to promote stress management
- Develop informational sessions on PTSD resources for Veterans and spouses, including complementary and alternative medicine resources
- Implement peer support programs for Veterans and spouses with PTSD to enable them to exchange social support

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support a range of evidence-based treatments for Veterans with PTSD and their families, including complementary and alternative medicine treatments
- Encourage the development of partnerships among installation providers (e.g., family programs, chaplains) to offer holistic care to Veterans and their family members
- Recommend education for providers working with military families about the benefits of and research evidence for complementary and alternative medicine techniques

This product is the result of a partnership funded by the Department of Defense between the Office of Military Community and Family Policy and the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture through a grant/cooperative agreement with The University of Minnesota.



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METHODS

- Veterans and spouses were recruited to complete a questionnaire about their PTSD symptoms at the beginning and end of six, week-long camps, as well as at a 4-6 week follow-up, and 218 of 219 Veterans and spouses agreed to participate.
- The retreats taught Emotional Freedom Techniques, which include elements of cognitive therapy, exposure therapy, and acupuncture, and other Energy Psychology methods in both group and individual sessions to help couples cope with PTSD symptoms.
- PTSD symptom scores were compared between pre-treatment, post-treatment, and follow-up for Veterans and spouses.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants included 109 Veterans, with a mean age of 51.1 years (SD = 12.3), and their spouses, with a mean age of 48.8 years (SD = 11.8), from a rural retreat center in the southwest United States.
- Veterans had experienced an average of 1.4 deployments (SD = 0.6) and 2.3 years spent deployed (SD = 1.4).
- No racial or ethnic information was provided.

LIMITATIONS

- Use of a treatment-seeking convenience sample limits the ability to generalize the findings to other military couples.
- The use of specific techniques during and after the retreat were not assessed, preventing specific conclusions about their distinct effectiveness.
- Since there was no control group, it is unknown to what extent nonspecific treatment effects or other factors might have influenced the results.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Conduct a similar effectiveness trial with a larger, more diverse sample of military couples and a wait-list control group to increase generalizability and the ability to make causal inferences
- Examine components of emotional freedom techniques to better understand which pieces and processes contribute to treatment gains
- Explore the effects of emotional freedom techniques in family treatment of PTSD, including with children of military families

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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