

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



**Focus:**  
Multiple  
Branches

## Predictors of Depression and PTSD Treatment Response Among Veterans Participating in Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction

Felleman, B. I., Stewart, D. G., Simpson, T. L., Heppner, P. S., & Kearney, D. J. (2016). Predictors of depression and PTSD treatment response among veterans participating in mindfulness-based stress reduction. *Mindfulness*, 7(4), 886-895. doi:10.1007/s12671-016-0527-7

**SUMMARY:** There is growing interest regarding the effectiveness of mindfulness-based interventions among Veterans who experience depression and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This study used a sample of Veterans who participated in mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) to examine PTSD and depression outcomes and baseline predictors of response before and after treatment. Results suggested clinically significant reductions in both PTSD and depression symptoms posttreatment and at four months follow-up.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Significant reductions in PTSD and depression occurred after participation in MBSR.
- Veterans with higher levels of PTSD and depression before treatment experienced the greatest reduction in symptoms after MBSR treatment.
- Women experienced a more rapid decline in PTSD and depressive symptoms compared to men, however these differences were not maintained at follow-up.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Disseminate information to military families regarding the mitigating effects of MBSR treatments on PTSD and depression
- Continue to provide support groups for Service members that experience PTSD and depression
- Offer support groups for the spouses and children of Service members who experiences PTSD and depression

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support research that examines the effectiveness of MBSR treatments on the reduction of depression and PTSD in military families
- Support programs that offer MBSR treatments options for Service members who experience PTSD and depression
- Encourage collaboration among DoD and community-based programs that provide services for military families coping with PTSD and depression to provide MBSR treatment options

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## METHODS

- Veterans participated in eight, two-and-a-half hour weekly MBSR groups. They also participated in a seven hour silent retreat that occurred on a weekend between the sixth and seventh group.
- All groups were led by MBSR instructors who had completed foundational trainings at the University of Massachusetts, Worcester, Center for Mindfulness.
- Participants completed the PTSD Checklist Civilian Version, the NIH-sponsored Patient Reported Outcomes Measurement Information System, and the Patient Health Questionnaire-9.
- Researchers examined differences in PTSD and depressive symptoms before and after MBSR treatment.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 117 Veterans collected from data gathered from the retrospective analysis of three MBSR clinical trials conducted at the VA Puget Sound Health Care System.
- The racial and ethnic breakdown of the sample was 78.4% White, 6% Black, 4.3% Latino, and the remainder of the sample was categorized as Other or Unknown.
- Approximately three-fourths of the sample was male (75.9%) and no data was provided regarding which branches of the military the Veterans served.

## LIMITATIONS

- The current study used a non-randomized treatment design, and although conclusions can be made regarding the efficacy of MBSR on PTSD or depression, a randomized treatment design may produce more confidence in the findings.
- The majority of the sample was older White men and limits the generalizability of the findings to other populations.
- All data gathered on PTSD and depression were self-report, thus increasing the chances of self-report bias.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Use a randomized treatment design to better understand the effectiveness of MBSR treatment on PTSD and depression among Veterans
- Recruit a more racially and ethnically diverse sample to increase generalizability among Veterans
- Consider using clinical reports or the reports of others (e.g., significant others) in obtaining data regarding PTSD and depressive symptoms

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



For more information about the Assessing Research that Works rating scale visit:  
<https://reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu/content/assessing-research-that-works>