

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Civilian

Impact of Meditation on Mental Health Outcomes of Female Trauma Survivors of Interpersonal Violence With Co-Occurring Disorders: A Randomized Controlled Trial

Lee, M. Y., Zaharlick, A., & Akers, D. (2017). Impact of meditation on mental health outcomes of female trauma survivors of interpersonal violence with co-occurring disorders: A randomized controlled trial. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 32(14), 2139–2165. doi:10.1177/0886260515591277

SUMMARY: Women who experienced interpersonal violence are at risk for developing mental health and trauma symptoms, and meditation can potentially be an effective intervention. This study randomly assigned 58 women who experienced interpersonal violence into a six-week meditation training condition or a control condition. Results indicated that meditation was effective at reducing these women's mental health and trauma symptoms.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Compared to participants in the control condition, more participants in the meditation condition experienced significant changes in mental health symptoms (36% vs. 8%) and trauma symptoms (42% vs. 5%).
- No participants in the meditation condition had negative changes in mental health symptoms or trauma symptoms, whereas 24% of participants in the control condition experienced more severe trauma symptoms after treatment.
- Participants in the meditation condition had significantly fewer mental health and trauma symptoms than participants in the control condition after treatment.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Attend training about meditation to enhance their abilities to provide meditation treatment as an option to Service members who experienced trauma
- Facilitate support groups for Service members who have posttraumatic stress disorder to decrease their symptoms

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer meditation workshops for Service members who show symptoms of trauma and anxiety
- Disseminate information regarding possible symptoms of depression, anxiety, and posttraumatic stress disorder after deployment and where military families can seek help for the symptoms

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Promote the development of programs that use meditation to help Service members deal with mental health symptoms and trauma symptoms
- Recommend education of professionals who work with military families on the effect of meditation on people's well-being

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

- Participants were recruited by flyers from a substance abuse treatment program for homeless women; women had to have experienced interpersonal violence to be eligible for the study.
- Participants in both the meditation and control groups received normal treatments from the substance abuse treatment center; in addition, participants in the meditation group also completed a six-week training on meditation.
- All participants completed questionnaires regarding their mental health and trauma symptoms both pre- and post-treatment.
- Data were analyzed to examine the effect of meditation on participants' mental health and trauma symptoms.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 58 women; 32 of them were in the meditation group and 26 of them were in the control group.
- The average age of participants was 38.6 years (age range = 22-56 years, SD = 8.6).
- The majority of participants in the meditation group were White (72%), whereas 42% of participants in the control group were White; the race/ethnicity of the rest of the participants was not reported.

LIMITATIONS

- There was a significant difference between the meditation and control groups in race/ethnicity, which may potentially contribute to the observed group differences.
- The sample was recruited from a substance abuse treatment program for homeless women; therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to women who do not seek treatment for substance abuse problems or women who are not homeless.
- The severity level of participants' interpersonal violence was not recorded or reported, so it is unclear whether women who experienced slight or severe interpersonal violence benefited equally from meditation.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Recruit women from various backgrounds (e.g., socioeconomic level, marital status) so that the results can be better generalized
- Examine the effectiveness of meditation on men who experienced interpersonal violence
- Explore whether people who experienced different severity levels of interpersonal violence can benefit equally from meditation

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