

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Challenges to Enrollment and Participation in Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Among Veterans: A Qualitative Study

Martinez, M. E., Kearney, D. J., Simpson, T., Felleman, B. I., Bernardi, N., & Sayre, G. (2015). Challenges to enrollment and participation in mindfulness-based stress reduction among veterans: A qualitative study. *The Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine*, 21(7), 409-421. doi:10.1089/acm.2014.0324

SUMMARY: This is a qualitative examination of barriers to completion of a Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program for Veterans offered at Veterans Affairs (VA) Puget Sound. Researchers examined barriers to enrollment, barriers to completion, and intervention-related challenges.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Researchers found barriers present in three different broad categories: barriers to enrollment, barriers to completion, and intervention-related challenges.
- Barriers to enrollment included lack of time, scheduling difficulties, misinformation from referring providers, and aversion to groups.
- Obstacles to completion included difficulties understanding the purpose of the exercises included in the program and negative reactions to others in the group.
- Intervention-related challenges included difficulties navigating group dynamics, the instructor's management of group structure and focus, challenges with the exercises themselves, and difficulties with the environment or materials.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Consider group dynamics (including gender and service experiences) when creating group programs for Service members
- Include flexible options for participation in programming for individuals who have scheduling difficulties or who may not want to participate in group-based activities
- Interview individuals who drop out of programs to identify program-specific barriers to completion

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Encourage programs that have particularly high attrition rates to examine barriers to completion
- Continue to support flexible delivery of programs, including online and other non-traditional methods
- Recommend training for professionals who work with military families about how to best facilitate group-based programs for Service members and their families

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.



Putting Research to Work for Military Families



METHODS

- Researchers interviewed 68 Veterans who were referred to an MBSR program at VA Puget Sound. Of these, 24 declined participation in the MBSR program, seven dropped out (attended fewer than four of the nine sessions), and 37 were considered to have completed the program (attended at least four sessions).
- Semi-structured interviews lasted about 15 minutes for decliners and 90 minutes for other participants.
- Interviews were then analyzed by categorizing statements regarding reasons for declining, dropping out, or completing the MBSR program. Through this analysis, researchers identified emerging themes.

PARTICIPANTS

- Data included in the analysis came from interviews with 48 Veterans (29% female) who were referred to an MBSR course at VA Puget Sound, with an average age of 54 (SD = 10.3).
- Participants were White (71%), Black (23%), Latino (4%) and Asian-American (2%).
- They served in a variety of periods, including Persian Gulf (42%), Vietnam (33%), Post-Vietnam (15%), OIF/OEF (8%), and Post-Korea (2%).

LIMITATIONS

- The sample size of this study was small, with a particularly small number of dropouts included, which makes it difficult to generalize findings to other groups.
- This study was specific to VA Puget Sound so the results may not be applicable to other locations.
- The focus was an MBSR program; different themes may emerge if examining barriers to other programs.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Include more dropouts in analyses in order to identify barriers that are specific to people who began the program but did not finish
- Examine the efficacy of groups that are specific to gender or service era as well as individual training versus group training
- Explore the efficacy of delivering Mindfulness-Based Interventions in new ways, such as through online platforms

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>