

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Civilian

Feasibility and Preliminary Outcomes of a School-Based Mindfulness Intervention for Urban Youth

Mendelson, T., Greenberg, M., Dariotis, J., Gould, L., Rhoades, B., & Leaf, P. (2010). Feasibility and preliminary outcomes of a school-based mindfulness intervention for urban youth. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 38(7), 985-994.
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SUMMARY: A 12-week mindfulness and yoga intervention for youth in urban schools was assessed for feasibility and influence on involuntary stress responses, depressive symptoms, and peer relations. The program was feasible and acceptable to students and teachers, and students who participated in mindfulness had significantly fewer involuntary stress responses than controls.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Students reported acceptability of the program, showing enthusiasm and indicating they felt they had learned useful skills for their day-to-day lives.
- Teachers were supportive of using mindfulness techniques and expressed interest in learning more about mindfulness.
- Students who participated in the mindfulness group, compared to those in the control group, had significantly fewer involuntary stress responses, including rumination, intrusive thoughts, and emotional arousal.
- No differences were found between the mindfulness and control groups on depressive symptoms or relationships with peers or teachers.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Help educate teachers and school staff about the potential benefits of mindfulness programs in schools
- Examine feasible ways to provide mindfulness programs to military youth, such as offering mindfulness in military schools or after-school programs

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide brief, drop-in mindfulness classes for military children to allow them to try out and explore these techniques
- Use reliable and valid instruments to assess the outcomes of mindfulness among military youth who participate in mindfulness

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support programs that increase resilience and overall well-being among military children, including mindfulness-based programs
- Recommend collaboration with mindfulness or yoga studies near base to offer accessible, affordable mindfulness-based opportunities to military youth

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METHODS

- Students were randomly selected from four Baltimore City public elementary schools to participate.
- Students completed measures of responses to stress, moods and emotions, and social support before and after the intervention, and post-intervention focus groups were conducted with participating youth and their teachers.
- The feasibility and acceptability of the mindfulness group was assessed, and the associations between the intervention and youth adjustment (e.g., mood, relationships, stress responses) were also examined.

PARTICIPANTS

- The total sample included 97 fourth and fifth grade students (61% female) with an average age of 9.83 years.
- Participants were either assigned to the mindfulness intervention (n = 51) or control (n = 46) group.
- Participants identified as Black (84%), Latino (4%), White (4%), or another race/ethnicity (7%).

LIMITATIONS

- The relatively small sample size did not permit tests of moderating or mediating variables.
- Differences between schools or classes were not examined, and the grouping of students may have influenced findings.
- Students who consented to participation may differ from those who did not (e.g., motivation, organization, parent willingness), which may have influenced outcomes.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Conduct a similar study with a larger, national sample and other outcome measures in addition to self-report
- Explore student factors that may influence how effectively mindfulness interventions reduce stress responses
- Examine whether the qualifications of the professional(s) providing a mindfulness intervention influence child outcomes

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