

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Marines

Mindfulness-Based Mind Fitness Training: A Case Study of a High-Stress Predeployment Military Cohort

Stanley, E. A., Schaldach, J. M., Kiyonaga, A., & Jha, A. P. (2011). Mindfulness-based mind fitness training: A case study of a high-stress predeployment military cohort. *Cognitive and Behavioral Practice, 18*(4), 566-576.
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SUMMARY: This mixed-methods study provides a comparison analysis of a cohort of U.S. Marine reservists who received a Mindfulness-based Mind Fitness Training (MMFT) as they prepared to deploy to Iraq to a control group of Marines from the same unit who did not receive the MMFT on levels of mindfulness, perceived stress, and personal outlook (e.g., novelty-seeking, flexibility, etc.). Those who engaged in MMFT reported greater levels of mindfulness, which were associated with decreased perceived stress.

KEY FINDINGS:

- More time spent practicing mindfulness techniques corresponded with higher levels of self-reported mindfulness after the 8-week course and an increase in level of mindfulness was associated with decreases in perceived stress.
- In interviews some Marines reported learning new skills such as focusing attention, staying with difficult experiences, understanding the stress activation cycle, using focused attention to support body and mind self-regulation; some married Marines reported improvements in family life as a result of the training.
- In interviews leaders and team members reported improved communication and unit cohesion; Leaders reported improved self-knowledge and improved ability to recognize emotions in themselves and others; team members reported increased awareness of individual strengths and weaknesses, which led to more effective task delegation and cooperation within the team.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer MMFT trainings to Service members pre- and post-deployment as it may lead to reductions in perceived stress
- Consider incorporating MMFT in trainings focused on individual stress or on team or group management as these were identified as benefits of MMFT in interviews
- Disseminate information to Service members and their families regarding the benefits of mindfulness practice at reducing stress

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continued to support efforts aimed at increasing awareness and working to reduce the stigma around seeking help for mental health issues
- Encourage the inclusion of alternative strategies, including MMFT, in pre-deployment training activities
- Recommend professional development trainings related to implementing evidence-based programs to help military families cope with deployment

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METHODS

- Marine reservists who received MMFT (high practice time vs. low practice time) were compared to a control group who did not receive MMFT, on their self-reported level of mindfulness, perceived stress, and personal outlook over time; focus groups and individual interviews were used to measure attitudes toward MMFT.
- Survey and interview data were collected before and after the eight week MMFT training.
- This study focused on Marine reservists who were preparing to deploy and agreed to receive the training.

PARTICIPANTS

- For the Marines who received the MMFT (N = 30), the average age was 29 years.
- The control group (N = 17) had an average age of 25 years.
- No other demographic data for the sample were provided.

LIMITATIONS

- Marines who participated may differ from non-participants in a way that was not measured but affected the outcome variables; although the Marines in the two groups were from the same unit they were tested at different installations with different testing atmospheres and the two groups had different predeployment training components and schedules.
- Conclusions based on a small, convenience sample may not generalize to other populations.
- Control group was not matched and differed on important factors such as prior deployment history and concurrent predeployment training activities. However, the control group was very similar in terms of their initial mindfulness score.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Continue to examine the effectiveness of MMFT in reducing stress-related mental health issues and and physical ailments
- Conduct longitudinal research to better understanding the long-term effects of MMFT
- Determine the efficacy of MMFT as a postdeployment program with military samples

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