

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Dance for Veterans: A Complementary Health Program for Veterans With Serious Mental Illness

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SUMMARY: A program evaluation of the Dance for Veterans program within the Veterans Affairs Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System (VAGLAHS) was conducted. The Dance for Veterans program was composed of physical, psychological, and social elements and was a new patient-centered and recovery-oriented treatment modality for Veterans diagnosed with serious mental illness.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Verbal reports of stress before and after class showed significant decreases.
- Subjective responses to the classes were overwhelmingly positive.
- Significant longer-term trends in stress reduction were not demonstrable.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Focus curriculum on the physical, psychological, and social elements needed to support Service members and their families
- Conduct cost-effective professional development such as Train-the-Trainer models for professionals who work with military families
- Develop training for military professionals to facilitate dance-based, patient-centered, recovery-oriented programs

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Encourage collaboration between military branches and arts-based agencies and professionals in order to facilitate best practices programming from both a support and arts-based perspective
- Support, across military branches, the benefits of arts-based, patient-centered, recovery-oriented programs for Service members
- Recommend integrating arts-based, patient-centered, recovery-oriented programs for Service members and their families across military branches

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METHODS

- Participants included 88 Veterans who were enrolled in Greater Los Angeles Dance for Veterans classes.
- A few of the goals of the program were to increase bodily awareness, expand individual and collective creative expression through movement and dance, and foster a sense of community and social integration.
- Veterans completed two questionnaires once a month for 3 months: the Music, Rhythm, and Movement Class Survey and the Perceived Stress Scale.

PARTICIPANTS

- Class participants were mostly male.
- There was no data provided on participant's age, race or ethnicity due to identity protection issues.
- Illnesses of participating Veterans included chronic schizophrenia, posttraumatic stress disorder of sufficient severity to cause impairment of social and occupational functioning and to require continuous treatment.
- Many participants were Veterans of the Iraq, Afghanistan, Gulf War and Vietnam conflicts.

LIMITATIONS

- Demographic information was minimal, which limits understanding of how the program may have affected different groups of individuals.
- Completion of weekly surveys was incomplete as participants participation varied from week to week, which could have biased towards the perspectives of those who attended.
- Only surveys that were completed were included in the analyses, which could have biased towards those who could or were more motivated to complete the survey.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Engage in a long-term study to understand if and how arts-based therapy programs may help mentally ill Service members manage their stress
- Conduct a qualitative study that explores Service members' experiences within arts-based, patient-centered, recovery-orientated programs
- Examine the necessary components for training professionals who can lead an arts-based therapy program for Service members suffering from severe mental illnesses

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