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Mind-Body Therapy for Military Veterans with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder: A Systematic Review

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Abstract

Objective: About one-third of service members returning from post-9/11 deployment in Afghanistan and Iraq report combat-related mental health conditions, but many do not seek conventional treatment. Mind-body therapies have been offered as alternative approaches to decreasing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), but no review of studies with veterans of post-9/11 operations was found. The objective of this study was to fill that gap.

Design: A systematic literature review was conducted following the preferred items for systematic reviews and meta-analyses (PRISMA) guidelines. PubMed MeSH terms were used to capture articles reporting on the military population (veteran and veterans) with PTSD who received a portable mind-body intervention (e.g., mindfulness, mind-body therapy, and yoga). PubMed/MEDLINE and PsycINFO were searched. Studies were included if participants were a mixed group of war veterans, as long as some post-9/11 veterans were included. In addition, participants must have had a diagnosis of PTSD or subthreshold PTSD, and the PTSD must have been attributable to combat, rather than another event, such as sexual trauma or natural disaster.

Results: Of 175 records identified, 15 met inclusion criteria. Studies reported on seated or gentle yoga that included breath work, meditation, mantra repetition, or breathing exercises. For 14 of the 15 studies, study retention was 70% or higher. Overall, studies reported significant improvements in PTSD symptoms in participants in these interventions. Although each study included post-9/11 veterans, about 85% of participants were from other conflicts, predominantly Vietnam.

Conclusion: Although findings were positive, future studies are needed to evaluate the short- and long-term impact of mind-body therapies on larger samples of post-9/11 veterans and to address research questions related to broadening service member and veteran participation in these therapies.

Keywords: PTSD; military; mind-body; veterans.

Similar articles

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