

The Effects of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction on Trauma in Victims of Gun Violence: A Pilot Study

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Objectives: Gun violence is one of the most significant problems in the United States of America. Gun violence produces lifelong psychological adversity, trauma and grief. In the face of this epidemic, efficacious self-regulatory therapies that assuage gun violence-based trauma and negative health are lacking.

Methods: The proposed pilot study examined the effects of an 8-week Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program on traumatized individuals as a direct consequence of gun violence. Twenty-four gun violence victims (median age = 53 years; 21 female) completed measures of trauma, grief, depression, sleep quality, life satisfaction, and mindfulness before, after five, and eight-weeks of MBSR training. It was hypothesized that trauma and corresponding comorbidities would improve following MBSR. It was also predicted that outcomes would be significantly stronger from baseline to five weeks of MBSR training than from five weeks to eight weeks of training.

Results: Before MBSR, study volunteers exhibited high levels of trauma, depression, sleep difficulty and grief. Participation in MBSR was associated with improved trauma, posttraumatic stress, depression, sleep difficulty, and overall life satisfaction. The most pronounced improvements in psychological disposition were exhibited within the first four weeks of MBSR. However, these benefits were largely preserved after completion of the eight week course.

Importantly, increases in dispositional mindfulness predicted lower trauma, complicated grief, and sleep difficulties.

Conclusions: The present findings should be interpreted with caution because they were derived from an uncontrolled, non-randomized trial. However, said findings suggest that MBSR may reduce trauma and improve overall well-being in gun violence victims.

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