



Are those who are more mindful also more resilient?

Dispositional resilience and mindfulness among active duty and veteran U.S. military service members

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Problem

- Resilience is an important component of coping.
- Studies have shown a positive linear relationship between dispositional resilience and mindfulness.
- Certain aspects of mindfulness contribute more to the relationship than others, but there is mixed evidence for the key contributors.
- An individual differences research approach could help fill in details about the relationship between resilience and mindfulness that are unavailable from a simple correlational approach.

Personal resilience refers to the ability to return to a stable trajectory of healthy functioning, even after encountering significant hardship or trauma (Bonanno, 2004). Military service members face inordinate stress, including deployment, separation from friends and family, and combat. Prior research has shown that personal resilience was associated with active duty and veteran U.S. Military volunteers' self-reported report stress coping strategies (Rice & Liu, 2016). In that study it was found that emotion-focused coping strategies (i.e., acceptance and positive reframing) were significantly positively correlated with resilience, and dysfunctional coping strategies (i.e., behavioral disengagement and self-blame) were significantly negatively correlated with resilience. Thus, resilience is an important component of healthy coping with stress.

Although resilience has also been linked with mindfulness, the nature of the relationship is not well understood. One proposal is that resilient individuals are more likely to adopt an emotionally open and accepting disposition toward traumatic experiences than the less resilient (Thompson, et al., 2011). Researchers have reported significant positive correlations between responses on measures of non-judgmental awareness of inner experiences and acceptance of emotional responses (Coffey, et al., 2010), but interactive effects with personal resilience have not been examined.

Other components of mindfulness have been shown to be positively associated with resilience. For example, in a small study (n=30) with active duty and veteran U.S. Military service members, Rice and colleagues (2013) found that increased resilience was significantly correlated with increased describing inner experience, acting with awareness, and non-reactivity to inner experience but not with observing inner experience and non-judgment of inner experience. More recently, resilience was found to mediate the relationship between scores on a measure of mindful attention and measures of affect (Bajaj & Pande, 2016).

Purpose

To examine the relationship between resilience and dispositional mindfulness among active duty and veteran U.S. military service members

Method

243 active duty and veteran U.S. Military service members completed the:

- Resiliency Scale (RS-14) (Wagnild, 2011)
- Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) (Brown & Ryan, 2003)
- Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ) (Baer, et al., 2008)

Results

Volunteers were primarily male (53.9%), Caucasian (53.5%), married (58.4%), completed college (61.3%), and were veterans (65.8%). Average age was 48.23 ± 12 yrs. and average time-in-service was 15 ± 8.72 yrs. The mean RS-14 score was 75.35 (± 16.79).

Resilience was correlated with all measures of mindfulness (see Correlation Table).

Four Percentage Ranked Groups (PRG) of resilience scores were established to examine differences of mindfulness scores.

Correlations

Measure	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. RS-14	.43**	.34**	.54**	.45**	.43**	.64**
2. MAAS	—	.27**	.42**	.82**	.47**	.42**
3. Observe	—	—	.41**	.22**	.07	.48**
4. Describe	—	—	—	.43**	.39**	.49**
5. Acting	—	—	—	—	.52**	.44**
6. Nonjudge	—	—	—	—	—	.41**
7. Nonreact	—	—	—	—	—	—

**p < .01, *p < .05

Scores on the mindfulness measures

Measure	RS-14 Total Score Percentile Ranks							
	25 th (n=58)		50 th (n=60)		75 th (n=61)		>75 th (n=64)	
MAAS	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
FFMQ	3.09	.82	3.43	.87	3.91	1.03	4.48	.89
Observe	21.98	5.94	24.48	7.18	26.10	5.47	27.84	5.87
Describe	20.12	6.54	25.38	6.70	26.59	5.86	32.02	6.30
Acting	20.24	6.00	23.42	6.28	26.15	7.19	30.80	6.52
Non-judge	21.36	5.81	25.28	6.72	27.28	6.20	31.11	7.23
Non-react	15.95	4.45	19.57	4.30	21.00	4.36	25.06	4.44

MAAS: Differences were seen between the PRGs, $F(3,242) = 27.47$, $p < .01$. Post-hoc comparisons showed scores differed significantly between each group, p 's < .05, except, the 25th and 50th percentile groups, $p = .30$.

FFMQ: FFMQ subscales were different between the PRGs, $F(15,711) = 9.96$, $p < .01$. See post hoc results below, the letters indicate significance. For example, in Observe 25% was not different from 50% (both have A's), but 25% was different from the 75% and > 75% (no letter in common).



FFMQ Post Hoc Differences

	Observe	Describe	Acting	Non-Judge	Non-React
25%	A	A	A	A	A
50%	AB	B	AB	B	B
75%	BC	B	B	B	B
>75%	C	C	C	C	C

Discussion

The results showed that resilience and dispositional mindfulness were closely related in this sample, although none of the participants had experience in mindfulness. In addition, the relationship between resilience and mindfulness appeared more nuanced than a bivariate correlation can reveal. The differences in mindfulness scores were consistent when comparing lowest and highest resilience scores (25% and ≥ 75% PRGs), but mindfulness differences were not seen for those with mid-level resilience scores (50%-75%) for all FFMQ measures, and low scores (25%-50%) for the MAAS, Observe, and Acting with Awareness. Thus, it appears that as resilience increased, mindfulness also increased, but not linearly. The differences in mindfulness, as aligned with resilience, appear to occur at three separate levels (high, moderate and low). It is thought that low levels of pre-deployment resilience may place a service member at greater risk for post-deployment psychosocial difficulties, such as Post-traumatic Stress Disorder. Should mindfulness training be used to help increase resilience, it appears that improvements might be more readily seen by emphasizing the mindfulness facets of Describing, Non-judging, and Non-reacting.

Conclusions

As scores in resilience improved, scores in dispositional mindfulness (the MAAS and all 5 facets of the FFMQ) also improved among U.S. military active duty and veterans. However, the relationship was non-linear (i.e. as resilience improved over four distinct levels, mindfulness improvements occurred in three levels for Describe, Non-Judging and Non-Reacting, and mindfulness improvements overlapped at lower resilience levels for Acting with Awareness, Observe, and the MAAS). This may explain non-significant changes in mindfulness after resilience training, and vice versa. These findings indicate that the relationship between dispositional resilience and mindfulness appear more complex than previously thought.

References

Available upon request