Transcendental meditation can help treat PTSD

By Maria Cohut

Fact checked by Isabel Godfrey

Working with a cohort of young people with symptoms of PTSD and depression, researchers found that practicing transcendental meditation can help reduce or even reverse these symptoms.

New evidence indicates that some types of meditation can successfully tackle mental health issues.

Studies have shown that meditation practices can have a significant, positive effect on mental health and how well our bodies respond to stress.

Existing research has also found that different types of meditation can even help boost a person's emotional intelligence.

Interest in meditation's potential as a tool for coping with various mental health symptoms has risen in recent years, and now, a new study suggests that
one type of meditation — called transcendental meditation — can successfully counteract PTSD and lower depression.

The researchers, who hail from various academic institutions across the world, including Norwich University in Northfield, VT and the Maharishi Institute in Johannesburg, South Africa, have worked with students from the Maharishi Institute and the University of Johannesburg who had all received diagnoses of PTSD and depression.

The investigators' findings, which appear in the journal Psychological Reports, indicate that participants who started practicing transcendental meditation saw notable improvements in their symptoms.

**Symptoms recede after 3.5 months**

The researchers worked with 34 students at the Maharishi Institute who had PTSD and depression. These students agreed to practice transcendental meditation, a type of meditation that involves chanting and focusing on mantras to achieve serenity.

Additionally, the team recruited a further 34 University of Johannesburg students with the same diagnoses who neither received any treatments nor took part in meditation for the duration of the study. These students acted as the control group.
How meditation impacts the way we learn
Meditation may change how we learn new information, researchers find.
READ NOW

At the beginning of the study period, which lasted 3.5 months, all of the participants scored 44 or over on the PCL-C test, which assesses PTSD symptoms. These scores signify that PTSD is very likely. Moreover, mental health professionals had also diagnosed PTSD in each of the participants.

At the end of the study, most of the participants from the transcendental meditation group had PCL-C scores below 34, which is the threshold for a PTSD diagnosis, indicating that their symptoms had altogether receded.

These participants also reported improvements in their depression symptoms.

In contrast, the participants in the control group, who did not take part in the meditation sessions and did not receive any other treatment, did not see any improvements.

'A way to effectively deal with this problem'
Some of the PTSD symptoms that the participants reported at the beginning of the study included nightmares, flashbacks to traumatic events, a sense of anxiety or fear, and a state of hypervigilance.

At that point in time, many of these students were also experiencing emotional numbness, states of anger, violent outbursts, and misuse of alcohol and drugs.

"A high percentage of young people in South Africa, especially those living in the townships, suffer from PTSD," explains study author Michael Dillbeck, from the Institute for Science, Technology, and Public Policy at the Maharishi University of Management in Fairfield, IA.
This issue extends beyond South Africa, however. In recent worldwide survey data that the World Health Organization (WHO) collected, 70.4 percent of the respondents reported experiencing trauma, and many of these individuals may have PTSD as a result.

"To become successful students and productive members of society, they absolutely need help dealing with the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder," Dillbeck points out, noting that a tool as simple as meditation could make an important difference to people's lives.

"Our study shows that after 3 months of meditation, [the meditation] group, on average, was out of PTSD. It offers a way for others to effectively deal with this problem."