

The Effects of Mind-Body Medicine Training on Health Professionals Working with Traumatized Populations

The Center for Mind-Body Medicine (CMBM) has trained health professionals working with traumatized populations New Orleans following hurricane Katrina and in Gaza, Israel, and Kosovo. The results of the training on these various groups are discussed below.

Health Professionals in New Orleans

Sixty-three health professionals attended the CMBM professional training program in New Orleans in 2007 following Hurricane Katrina. The following improvements were measured after the training:

- A significant decrease (17%) in the overall posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) scores following the training. Significantly fewer participants reporting hyperarousal symptoms (i.e. difficulty sleeping and concentrating, outbursts of anger, exaggerated startle response, hyper-vigilance) (42% pre vs 15% post-training)
- Statistically significant improvements in anxiety, depression, anger, fatigue and vigor
- Significant improvement in all spirituality subscales including an enhanced sense of purpose and meaning in life, of wholeness, empowerment, and feelings of connectedness and transcendence
- Significantly decreased compassion fatigue/secondary trauma related to work in those participants responding to the three month follow-up

Health Professionals in Gaza

Eighty-seven health professionals attended the CMBM professional training program in Gaza in 2005. These participants had high levels of trauma exposure as a result of the ongoing conflict: 16% had their house damaged; 45% had been shot; 36% had family members die; 69% had friends or close acquaintances die; 93% witnessed shooting fighting or explosion; 91% witnessed strangers being injured or killed; 65% witnessed family members being injured or killed; 79% witnessed friends or close acquaintances being injured or killed.

Following the training the following improvements were measured:

- Significant improvement in anger, confusion, depression, fatigue, anxiety, and vigor

- Significant improvement in all spirituality subscales including an enhanced sense of purpose and meaning in life, of wholeness, empowerment, and feelings of connectedness and transcendence

Participants continued to use the skills personally between the initial and advanced training and reported that using the mind-body skills helped them reduce stress, cope with trauma, solve problems, and control emotions. They also reported improved health conditions, improved personal interactions, increased self-awareness/self-care and benefits to their work.

Health Professionals in Israel

One hundred sixteen health professionals attended the CMBM professional training program in July 2006. Trauma exposure was reported as follows: 20% of participants had been a victim of an act of violence as a result of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; 4% had been injured as a result; and 41% had family members or close acquaintances that had been a victim of these acts of violence. Of these, 18% had family members or close acquaintances who had been killed and 15% were injured.

Following the training the following improvements were measured:

- Significant improvement work satisfaction and burnout
- Significant improvement in anxiety, anger, confusion, fatigue and vigor
- Significant improvement in all spirituality subscales including an enhanced sense of purpose and meaning in life, of wholeness, empowerment, and feelings of connectedness and transcendence

Participants felt significantly more optimistic about their personal future and scored significantly higher on how much of a positive contribution they feel they make to the psychological welfare of their fellow citizens. However, they also felt that their lives were in more danger, were more troubled by the conflict within society, and found the current situation more personally threatening. These increases were a reflection of the Israel-Hezbollah War that began during the training.

Similar improvements in mood and spirituality subscales were reported following the advanced training program. There was also a significant increase in the personal practice of all mind-body skills between the initial and advanced training with the personal practice of meditation doubling from 5 to 10 days a month.

Health Professionals in Kosovo

Two hundred twenty health professionals attended the CMBM professional training program in July 2006.

Following the training the following improvements were measured:

- Significant improvement in anger, confusion, depression, fatigue, anxiety, and vigor
- Significant improvement in life purpose and satisfaction

The personal use of mind-body skills between the initial and advanced training was very high with 100% of participants using meditation and 57% using biofeedback and imagery.

In summary, these training programs provided health professionals with the tools to make positive changes in their mood and view of themselves both personally and professionally.