

SEXUAL ASSAULT REPORTS ON THE RISE

Among women, reported sexual assaults rose from 4.4 percent in fiscal year 2010 to 6.1 percent in 2012—a significant rise.

During the same period of time, reported sexual assault among men rose from 0.9 percent to 1.2 percent.

However it is important to note that sexual assault is often unreported. Therefore the problem is more widespread than the numbers suggest.

“Building the evidence base for non-traumatic integrative treatments like Guided Imagery is essential to providing our Service members and veterans with the best possible care.”

*Joan Walter, JD, PA
Chief Operating Officer
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GUIDED IMAGERY FOR SEXUAL TRAUMA

Sexual assault in the military remains a significant problem that is often associated with post-traumatic stress and other complex, co-existing psychological health disorders. Exposure therapy, the standard therapy for post-traumatic stress, is often not an option for victims of sexual assault because it is very traumatic to the victim. Samueli Institute funded the first randomized control trial of Guided Imagery, a non-traumatic approach, for women veterans who sustained sexual trauma during their service to see whether this integrative treatment could reduce symptoms of post-traumatic stress.

The 2006 study included brain scans and hormone level testing to examine potential improvements in brain function and levels of stress hormones following the Guided Imagery treatment.

The test group received three Guided Imagery audio tracks, two relaxation tracks and one Healing Trauma track, and two in-person coaching sessions with a clinician and weekly telephone calls. The control group received two 30-minute audio tracks with relaxing background music, two supportive in-person sessions with a clinician and weekly telephone calls.

WHAT IS GUIDED IMAGERY?

Guided imagery is a mind-body technique that focuses and directs the imagination to create a positive impact on health, creativity and performance. This sensory-rich meditation style appeals to a western audience including star athletes and Olympians, who tap into the power of guided imagery to improve their performance by imagining success.

For trauma survivors, it is thought that guided imagery can improve relaxation skills and stimulate the ability for self-empowerment.

PROMISING RESULTS

This study yielded strong results: large, significant effect sizes, consistent with best outcomes from individuals with prolonged exposure. From this study, we found that 80 percent of change occurred by the sixth week. The observed effect size was 52 percent greater than that observed from the control condition. And though the music controls also showed impressive improvement, the guided imagery group still maintained treatment gains after nine months, whereas the controls were trending back towards their baseline levels by then.

Compared with more expensive, time-consuming, traumatic and hard-to-implement practices currently in use for post-traumatic stress, Guided Imagery emerges as a viable treatment option.

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STRAUSS JL, Marx CE, Calhoun PS. Guided imagery as a therapeutic tool in PTSD. Chapter in: Neurobiology of PTSD. Shiromani P, Keane T, LeDoux J, eds. Humana Press, Inc; Totowa, NJ 2008