

MEDITATION IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS FOR PREVENTING AND HEALING DOMESTIC ABUSE

Sarah Hamm

RAAB WRITING FELLOW

Mentor Dr. Paul Mena

THE PROBLEM

Domestic abuse crushes lives and destroys families, and it's a large-scale problem in our society. In California, over 30% of adults experience intimate partner violence (IPV) at some time in their life,¹ and over 600 thousand children nationally were abused or neglected in 2018.² Poor mental health and previous history with abuse are major risk factors for perpetrating IPV. Intimate partner abuse leaves people with lasting trauma effects, including PTSD and depression, even long after the incidents.

THE SOLUTION

Mindfulness meditation strengthens mental health and resilience, providing improved trauma healing and coping skills. Further, good mental health and coping skills have preventative effects on perpetration of IPV. Learning mindfulness meditation skills early maximizes the benefit they can provide throughout a lifetime. Public schools give an optimal avenue for disseminating knowledge and skills on a societal scale. Integrating mindfulness meditation into existing public school curriculum can be easy, fast, and low cost.

EVIDENCE

Evidence is gathered from peer reviewed academic research and meta-analyses, which are then compiled into a coherent argument. Notably compelling studies are spotlighted here.

-Domestic abuse data are gathered from the US DHHS Administration for Children and Families (1. ACF HHS. 15 January 2020. 29th edition of the Child Maltreatment Report.), and the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (2. NCADV. 2020. "Domestic Violence in California" Fact Sheet.). Both government and advocacy sources have an interest in reducing abuse and provide a stark picture of the scope of the problem.

-A meta-analysis by CM Spencer et al. reveals patterns in perpetration risk and protective factors. The results clearly show a strong link between mental health and abuse perpetration.

-Mindy B. Mechanic et al. expose the long term mental health effects of abuse in a survey of over 400 survivors. Survey answers show that trauma responses persist long after the abuse stops, even while survivors feel great increases in self-esteem.

-A study by Kelly and Garland provided IPV survivors with significant decreases in PTSD and depression symptoms.

-Nimrod Sheinman et al. demonstrated that schoolchildren with at least one year of mindfulness training voluntarily used the skills as coping strategies outside of the training program.

-An experiment conducted by Kimberly Schonert-Reichl et al. confirmed that fourth and fifth grade students and their teachers were able to perform with considerable ease a three minute mindfulness exercise thrice daily coupled with a weekly short lesson on social-emotional skills. At the end of twelve weeks, the students self-reported greater feelings of well-being and rated each other as being more prosocial compared to the start of the program. They were also reported to have greater self-control and less aggression at the end of the experiment. Additionally, no additional staffing or training was needed to employ the program.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- California should implement an augmentation to existing public school curriculum that includes a daily three minute mindfulness practice.
- An initial short introductory lesson on mindfulness should be given in the first week of school.
- To assess the results of implementing such a program, classroom leaders should submit a weekly behavior report to track potential outcomes.
- This report focuses on recommendations to the state because, if success is shown, the state can serve as an example for the rest of the country.

