

Mindfulness May Reduce Stress for Students of Color

New research explores the role of compassion-based meditation in boosting the mental health of students who experience racism.

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We've long known that racism and discrimination [negatively impact](#) the mental health and well-being of ethnic minorities.

A [new study](#) shows that a combination of compassion-focused meditation and psychoeducation may help to relieve race-related stress and improve mental health among Asian college students in the US.

Racism on college campuses received increasing attention in recent years. [Studies show](#) that students of color often feel the effects of race-related stress the most, with many experiencing depression and anxiety as well as difficulties keeping up with their studies. To address this problem, researchers at Claremont McKenna College in Claremont, California, conducted a pilot study to see if an intervention that included compassionate meditation might make a difference.

Ten undergraduate students of Asian heritage, who reported high levels of race-related stress, attended the program. None of these students had a background in meditation, and 90% reported experiencing major depression within the past two weeks.

The 8-week intervention, "Using Compassionate Meditation to Heal from Race-Related Stress," combined principles from cognitive-behavioral therapy such as countering every negative thought with three positive ones, education regarding the impacts of anger and compassion, and mindfulness practices such as meditative deep breathing. It was taught by two Asian-American undergraduate students

(peer leaders) who were trained and supervised by a licensed clinical psychologist.

Students reported notable decreases in psychological distress, depression, anxiety, and trauma-related symptoms such as disturbing memories, physical reactions, and difficulty concentrating.

Before and after attending the program, students completed an online survey about their levels of stress, depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress and general distress, self-compassion, and ability to cope with discrimination.

After eight weeks, students reported notable decreases in psychological distress, depression, anxiety, and trauma-related symptoms such as disturbing memories, physical reactions, and difficulty concentrating. Interestingly, their self-compassion ratings also decreased.

The findings of the study are encouraging given the small number of participants, which can make it difficult to detect changes due to low statistical power. Because this was a pilot study, additional research with a larger number of students will be necessary before drawing any conclusions about whether a peer-led program combining compassion meditation with

cognitive-behavioral principles and psychoeducation might benefit other students from ethnic minority groups.

College campuses often do not have [ethnic minority counselors or therapists](#). As a result, students experiencing racial discrimination, stress or other psychological difficulties can be reluctant to seek professional help. This study suggests that compassion meditation-focused programs led by peers may fill a very important gap for students experiencing race-related stress.