

War veterans say meditation could solve PTSD

February 5 2013, by Sebastian Smith

US war veterans on Monday suggested meditation to help heal the post-war mental disturbances that afflict a growing number of American soldiers, including possibly the ex-Marine who gunned down the country's most famous sniper over the weekend.

Meditation might sound an unlikely activity for men trained in killing people and blowing things up in Afghanistan and Iraq.

But Luke Jensen, a former undercover police officer who fell apart mentally on arrival in Afghanistan, said that after trying to commit suicide in front of his family, he agreed to try [transcendental meditation](#)—and was saved.

"There's a lot of coping methods out there that are offered to our veterans. This needs to be one of them," the heftily built man said in a shaking voice at a meeting of the David Lynch Foundation, which promotes meditation for treating [post-traumatic stress disorder](#).

Jensen said he has since taken a job in the government's Department of Veterans Affairs, helping other stressed out vets. Just two weeks ago, one of those he worked with [committed suicide](#).

Transcendental meditation "needs to be implemented. It needs to be an option," Jensen told the panel in New York.

After years of being a little-talked about subject, [PTSD](#) is increasingly

acknowledged as a mental health epidemic in the United States and one of the less easily quantifiable costs of America's wars on the other side of the world.

The Department of Veterans Affairs estimates that PTSD occurs in between 11 and 20 percent of veterans from the Afghan and Iraq wars, and in 31 percent of [Vietnam war](#) veterans.

Although combat is commonly assumed to be the main cause of PTSD, simply witnessing the effects of bombings, for example, or the stress of being in a hostile country, are also blamed.

Another major source of PTSD, though less often discussed, is what the government calls military [sexual trauma](#). [Veterans Affairs](#) figures show that 23 percent of women report [sexual assault](#) in the ranks, while more than half have experienced sexual harassment.

The most frightening result associated with PTSD is the rising number of suicides, which now run at 22 a day among military veterans, according to a government study released last week.

And the problem is no less alarming among active duty soldiers, with a record 349 killing themselves in 2012—more than were killed by the Taliban or other enemy in the field.

In the latest incident to highlight the violence engulfing former soldiers, an ex-Marine in Texas was accused Saturday of shooting dead another veteran who had devoted himself to helping comrades adjust to peaceful life.

Adding to the shock value, the victim, Chris Kyle, was an author of a best-selling book about his former exploits as a sniper with 150 confirmed kills.

In the effort to address the problem of PTSD, meditation is an outlier.

However, early studies show remarkable success, and demand is growing, advocates at filmmaker Lynch's foundation said.

Transcendental meditation involves entering "a state of rest in many cases deeper than sleep," said Bob Roth, executive director of the David Lynch Foundation. "This allows deeply rooted stresses to be dissolved."

Retired rear admiral Richard Schneider, president of the private military institute Norwich University, said tests showed that cadets using the techniques increased focus in class and were better "emotionally prepared."

The meditation instructor, a chisel-faced air force veteran called David Zobeck, said a stigma long attached to [meditation](#) was evaporating among students, who are preparing for careers as officers.

"They're not getting the weird stares anymore," he said.

Jerry Yellin, a fighter pilot in World War II who spoke of losing comrades and making dangerous missions in the bloody Pacific theater, said he began suffering nightmares, then behavioral problems on return home at a time when PTSD was rarely discussed.

"The hard stuff began in my life, because I didn't sleep," he said. "I had an addiction that ruled my life."

Meditating, he said, "got my life back 100 percent."

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