

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

The Role of Psychological Symptomatology and Social Support in the Academic Adjustment of Previously Deployed Student Veterans

Campbell, R., & Riggs, S. A. (2015). The role of psychological symptomatology and social support in the academic adjustment of previously deployed student veterans. *Journal of American College Health*, 63(7), 473-481.
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SUMMARY: College student Veterans were surveyed to examine the associations between social support, unit support, mental health, and academic adjustment. There were significant findings that suggested aspects of mental health were related to academic adjustment. Further, each type of support was also related to academic adjustment.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Older Veterans reported better academic adjustment than younger Veterans.
- Veterans who reported greater unit support during deployment and more social support also reported better academic adjustment.
- Generalized anxiety (e.g., worry, restlessness, irritability) was negatively linked to academic adjustment, but posttraumatic stress symptoms were positively associated with academic adjustment.
- Once Veterans' age was factored into the analyses, depressive symptoms were no longer associated with academic adjustment.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer classes for student Service members about academic success strategies
- Provide courses for Service members; friends and family about the importance of social support for Service members during college
- Teach Service members strategies for coping with posttraumatic stress in educational settings

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Urge the training of professionals who work with families to learn how to better support young Veterans who are transitioning to college
- Recommend that student Service members be offered additional mental health and academic support resources and services
- Encourage programs for Service members considering higher education to provide information about the connections between academic success and mental health

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METHODS

- Veterans were recruited to participate through email invitations and mailed letters.
- Participants completed scales of anxiety symptoms, depressive symptoms, social support from family, friends, and significant others, unit support during deployment, and adjustment to college.
- Statistical analyses were used to test associations between mental health, deployment experience, social support, and adjustment to college.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were previously deployed Veterans (N=117) who were currently enrolled as an undergraduate or graduate student in one of three Texas universities.
- Average age was 32.5 years (SD = 7.52). The majority (84%) of the sample was male.
- Racial/ethnic composition of the sample was 78% White, 6% Latino, 4% Black, 4% Asian-American, and 8% other.
- Military branch composition of the sample was 45% Army, 19% Navy, 20% Marine Corps, and 16% Air Force.

LIMITATIONS

- The data were cross-sectional, and, therefore causality cannot be inferred.
- Only Veterans attending college in Texas were included in the sample, and results may not generalize to Veterans attending college in other states.
- All data were retrospective and self-reported, which may introduce biases.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine other variables that may be associated with academic adjustment, such as academic performance during high school and collegiate staff support
- Replicate this study with a larger, more diverse sample of Service members
- Explore the helpfulness of academic support services, as well as barriers to accessing them, for student Service members

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