

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Mental Health Treatment-Related Stigma and Professional Help Seeking Among Student Veterans

Currier, J. M., McDermott, R. C., & McCormick, W. H. (2017). Mental health treatment-related stigma and professional help seeking among student Veterans. *Psychological Services, 14*(4), 531–542. doi:10.1037/ser0000129

SUMMARY: College students who used to serve in the military often suffer from mental health issues; however, little is known about their mental health needs or concerns. For this study, 251 Veterans students and 251 civilian students completed an online survey regarding their mental health symptoms, help-seeking intentions, and treatment stigma. Results revealed some differences between the Veteran and civilian students regarding help-seeking intentions and treatment stigma.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Veteran students were more likely than civilian students to seek help for mental health problems.
- Compared to civilian students, Veterans had less mental health treatment-related stigma but more negative beliefs about the usefulness of treatment.
- Compared to Veterans with fewer mental health symptoms, those with more symptoms also had more stigma.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Disseminate information on military bases regarding useful resources for mental health issues
- Offer support groups for Service members who experienced combat-related mental health disorders (e.g., posttraumatic stress disorder [PTSD], depression)
- Educate professionals working with Service members on how to help Service members reduce mental health treatment-related stigma

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Raise awareness on military bases regarding the effectiveness of mental health treatment
- Continue to support programs that teach Service members about different types of mental health services from which they can benefit
- Recommend awareness campaigns in order to reduce the mental health help-seeking stigma that Service members usually have

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METHODS

- All participants were recruited from the same research university; they were invited to completed an online survey by email.
- Measures assess PTSD symptoms, depression, negative beliefs about mental health treatment, self-stigma for seeking mental health professional help, and help-seeking intentions.
- Data from the Veteran and civilian students samples were compared to examine their differences in mental health treatment-related stigma and help-seeking intentions.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 251 Veteran undergraduate students (73% male, mean age = 31.90, SD = 9.41) and 251 gender-matched students (73% male, mean age = 22.87, SD = 6.97) who did not serve in the military.
- The majority of the Veteran students were White (63%), followed by Black (26%), Latino (4%), Asian American (2%), Multiracial (3%), and other (2%); the majority of the civilian students were also White (57%), followed by Black (25%), Latino (3%), Asian American (4%), Multiracial (2%), and other (9%).
- The military branches that the Veterans served in were Army (43%), Navy (21%), Air Force (16%), Marines (13%), Coast Guard (6%), and multiple branches (1%).

LIMITATIONS

- The study focused on participants' intention to seek help, which may not equal to their actual help-seeking behavior.
- All participants were recruited from one university, so caution must be taken to generalize the results to Veteran students in other geographic regions.
- The civilian sample was significantly younger than the Veteran sample; therefore, the age difference may potentially explain the group differences and the age differences were not controlled for.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Conduct longitudinal studies to examine the causal relationship between treatment stigma and help-seeking intentions
- Recruit participants from different geographic regions so that the findings can be better generalized
- Examine how gender may influence Service members' help-seeking behaviors

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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