

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Student Service Members/Veterans' Mental Health: Who is at a Greater Risk for Posttraumatic Stress Symptoms on College Campuses?

Nyaronga, D., & Toma, R. (2015). Student service members/veterans' mental health: Who is at a greater risk for posttraumatic stress symptoms on college campuses? *Military Psychology, 27*(4), 223-231. doi:10.1037/mil0000079

SUMMARY: A survey of 900 university student Service members and Veterans was administered to determine whether posttraumatic stress (PTS) symptoms are significantly correlated with demographic factors (e.g., age, race, marital status), risk factors (e.g., military branch, combat exposure), and resources (e.g., social support, religiosity). Overall, the independent variables explained 40% of the PTS symptoms providing new information about Service member and Veteran populations on campus that may be at a greater risk for PTS.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Being a Black student Service member or Veteran was significantly and positively associated with PTS symptom scores.
- Deployment in combat zones was significantly and positively associated with PTS symptom scores.
- The family support score was not significantly associated with PTS symptom scores in student Service members and Veterans.
- Friend support scores were significantly and negatively associated with PTS symptom scores.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Develop workshops for military families around topics related to PTS
- Provide support networks for specific groups of Service members and Veterans most at risk for PTS symptoms
- Develop online resources for parents of Service members and Veterans about risk factors associated with PTS

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend professional development for professionals who work with military families around demographic and risk factors associated with Service members' PTS symptoms
- Encourage collaboration between military branches and higher education institutions so as to support at-risk student Service member and Veteran populations
- Recommend higher education institutions have Service member and Veteran centers that help create opportunities for networking, social, and academic support

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METHODS

- The campus Office of Veterans and Military Education sent out an e-mail with a cover letter, informed consent forms, and a link to the survey to 900 student Service members and Veterans.
- Eleven validated items from the Mississippi Scale for Combat-Related Posttraumatic Stress Disorder were used as well as the Perceived Social Support scale.
- Analyses examined whether the independent variables (e.g. age, race, gender, marital status, branch of the military, nature of deployment) explained PTS symptoms scores.

PARTICIPANTS

- The survey sample included 71% Veteran and 29% Service members and 71.5% were male and 28.5% were female.
- In terms of race and ethnicity, 73% identified as White, 10% Black, 12.5% Latino/Latina, 2% Asian, and 2.5% other.
- Thirty-seven percent served in the Army, 26% in the Navy, 18% in the Air Force, 15% in the Marines, and 2% in the Coast Guard, and 33% had been deployed to a combat zone.

LIMITATIONS

- With a survey response rate of 16% (N = 144) the conclusions cannot be generalized to the larger student Service member and Veteran population.
- Since data were not collected at the onset of PTS symptoms there is no way to determine which experiences (combat or non-combat) were the cause of the symptoms.
- The data collected in the study were self-reported; therefore, it was only looking at PTS symptoms, not an actual diagnosis of PTS.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Investigate types of strategies higher education institutions could employ that enable them to better support at-risk student Service member and Veteran populations
- Conduct a large scale study on student Service members and Veterans' PTS that includes a diverse set of colleges and universities.
- Examine effective programs higher education institutions have employed to facilitate student Service members and Veterans' networking, social, and academic support.

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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