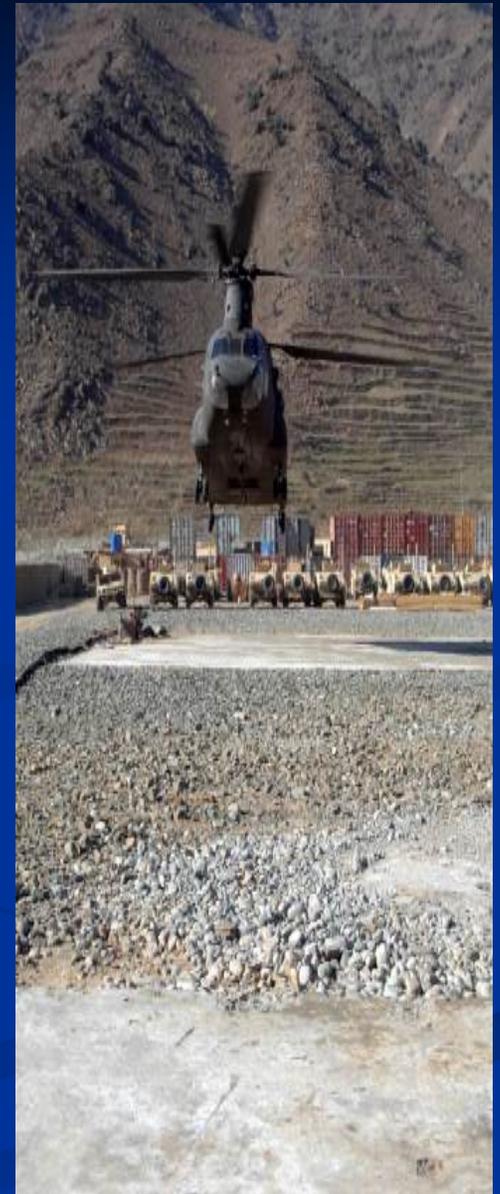


Veteran's Reintegration Concerns

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US Army Veteran

OEF/OIF/OND

- As of Sept 11, 2013 --- 6,757 American service members have been killed in Afghanistan and Iraq; 8,576 deaths in Iraq and Afghanistan among all coalition forces
- All **volunteer** military, although many national guard and reservists never expected to go to war
- Most women in combat theater to date
- **Female** combatants are more likely to be sexually assaulted than shot at; 41% of females are reporting sexual assault; numbers may be higher
- Wider range of **ages** than in previous conflicts
- Enemy is unclear – constant vigilance



More Wounded Survive

- High wounded-to-killed ratio
 - Global War of Terrorism
 - OEF, 5 wounded service members for every fatality
 - OIF, 7.2 wounded service members for every fatality
 - Vietnam = 2.6:1
 - Korean War = 2.8:1
 - WWI and WWII < 2:1

Institute of Medicine. (2010). Returning Home from Iraq and Afghanistan: Preliminary Assessment of Readjustment Needs of Veterans, Service Members and Their Families

Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Public Affairs, "America's Wars", September 30, 2006.

Combat in a Civilian Environment



Vanderploeg, R.D. (2010, June). Post-Deployment Adjustment: Understanding the Post-Deployment Context . Presentation at the Department of Veterans Affairs, A Team Approach to Veterans with Co-morbid Conditions Conference.

Surrounded by Devastation



Vanderploeg, R.D. (2010, June). Post-Deployment Adjustment: Understanding the Post-Deployment Context. Presentation at the Department of Veterans Affairs, A Team Approach to Veterans with Co-morbid Conditions Conference.

Drone Strikes



Summary

- This is a unique war.....
 - ✓ Different population
 - ✓ More wounded survive
 - ✓ More women than in previous conflicts
 - ✓ Family issues are quite relevant

Combat to College



Campus Diversity

- Understanding student Veterans means understanding military culture, battlefield skills, and deployment related stressors. It also means listening to student stories, and understanding the unique stressors faced by student Veterans on campus.

Structure vs. Independent Thinking

- Military culture and battlefield skills can be deeply internalized by many Service Members. Sometimes, core beliefs and principles learned through military service can conflict with the beliefs and principles underlying higher education. For example, following orders and respecting rank and formality may run counter to the independent thinking and informality encouraged in many classrooms.

Pros & Cons

- Buddies (Cohesion) vs. Withdrawal
- Accountability vs. Control
- Targeted vs. Inappropriate Aggression
- Tactical Awareness vs. Hypervigilance
- Lethally Armed vs. “Locked & Loaded” at Home
- Emotional Control vs. Anger/Detachment
- Mission OPSEC vs. Secretiveness
- Individual Responsibility vs. Guilt
- Non-Defense (Combat) vs. Aggressive Driving
- Discipline & Ordering vs. Conflict

Academic Performance

- Student Veterans report mixed concerns about academic success. Some report a readiness for school work that is heightened by their military experience. For example, one student Veteran introduced himself to professors at the beginning of each semester as follows, "I'm 25. I'm a Veteran. I'm not here to party. I'm here to work". Other student Veterans report concerns about performing up to academic standards. Courses and trainings in the military can be quite different (e.g., duty specific, practical), than college classes. As a whole, research findings suggest that student Veterans are less academically engaged and perceive lower levels of support from their campuses than non-Veterans.

Veterans who experienced trauma &/or TBI may have difficulty with aspects of college life:

- Difficulty with concentration & organization
- Poor frustration tolerance
- Forgetfulness
- Slower processing speeds
- Visual and auditory problems
- Difficulties with crowds or startling noises
- Problems with sleep and physical pain may also distract them from their studies

Possible Difficulties that Veterans May Face

- Mental health related illness
- Increased aggression
- Wounded or disabled
- Lack the necessary skills to be academically/vocationally successful
- Homelessness
- Unemployment
- Substance Use Disorders

Challenges for Veterans

- Attention and concentration
- Social isolation
- Disconnectedness from family and civilians due to life experiences
- Anger and irritability
- Side effects of medications may interfere with attendance and/or performance
- Managing crowded spaces (i.e. college, work, ball games)
- Discussion of current events may be a trigger

Typical Readjustment Concerns

- Anxiety, feeling “on edge”
- Vigilant to safety concerns
- Frequent reminders of military experiences
- Feeling disconnected to friends, family, general civilian population
- Feeling emotionally numb
- Anger and irritability
- Problems with attention, concentration and memory
- Changes in sleep patterns
- Difficulty falling asleep
- Difficulty staying asleep, nightmares

Common Post-deployment Reactions

Physical Reactions

- Trouble sleeping
- Stomach upset
- Trouble eating
- Rapid heart beat
- Experiencing shock, numb, unable to feel happy
- Existing health problems worsen

Emotional Reactions

- Bad dreams, nightmares
- Intrusive memories
- Anger
- Feeling nervous, helpless, or fearful
- Guilt, shame, self-blame
- Feeling sad/rejected/abandoned
- Negative outlook

Behavioral Reactions

- Trouble concentrating
- Edgy, jumpy
- Being on point
- Avoidance
- Too much drinking, smoking, other drug use
- Poor self-care
- Aggressive driving

Typical Readjustment Concerns: The Good News

- Most of these symptoms resolve on their own, over time
- Majority of returning veterans do NOT have PTSD or other mental health disorders
- Engaging in structured activities, like school, assists with readjustment

What is PTSD

- PTSD stands for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder. PTSD can develop after someone has experienced a traumatic event, for example, combat or a physical or sexual assault. Although most people have experienced at least one traumatic event in their life time, only a small percentage will develop PTSD. Over 90% of returning Veterans have experienced a traumatic event in their lifetime, however, only 10-30% will develop PTSD.

Symptoms Criteria PTSD

Avoidance

- Thoughts
- Feelings
- Conversations
- Detachments
- Numbness
- Restricted affect
- Foreshortened future
- People
- Places
- Activities
- Loss of interest

Reexperiencing

- Flashbacks
- Intrusive memories
- Distressing dreams
- Physiological reactivity
- Distress with reminders

Hyperarousal

- Trouble concentrating
- Edgy, jumpy
- Being on point/hypervigilance
- Poor sleep
- Anger/irritability

- E. Duration of disturbance > 1 month
- F. Functional Impairment

Strengths of Veterans

- Motivated, goal-directed
- Responsible
- Regimental
- Skilled leaders— evident in group projects, formation of study groups
- Mature as a result of age and life experience

VITAL

- Veterans Integration to Academic Leadership
- Dr. Jade Wolfman-Charles
- Towson University & CCBC

Military Culture Quiz

- True/False: Members of the Reserves and the National Guard participate in training one weekend a month and two weeks per year.
- Someone with a grade of E-3 (enlisted-3) in the Army would be called
 - Private first class
 - Corporal
 - Sergeant
 - Petty officer
- Close to 50% of returning Veterans will have:
 - Engaged in hand to hand combat with the enemy
 - Experienced a blow to the head
 - Witnessed brutality toward detainees
 - Known a friend who was wounded or killed

Quiz

- What percentage of student Veterans report that the Post 9/11 GI bill was a major influence in their decision to pursue higher education?
 - 15%
 - 25%
 - 35%
 - 45%
- True/False: Student Veterans may appear easily distracted. They have been trained to assess for threat, so noises and movement may pull their attention from the instructor. Given this, the best way to minimize distraction would be to place the Veteran in the front row.
- It is estimated that _____ percent of returning Veterans will meet diagnostic criteria for PTSD:
 - Less than 10%
 - Between 10-30%
 - Between 30 and 50%
 - Over 50%

Quiz

- True/False: If a Veteran does not identify himself or herself as a Veteran, you should be sure to recognize their Veteran status to the class.
- Which of the following battlefield skills could impact adjustment to campus life?
 - Mission orientation
 - Hyperawareness for safe
 - Emotional control
 - All of the above
- If a student Veteran presents to you with hopelessness or suicidal thoughts, which of the following should you NOT do?
 - Give them the Suicide Hotline number
 - Refer them to counseling
 - Walk them to the Student Counseling center
 - Tell them these feelings will pass.
- True or False: There are more female student Veterans than might be expected from their numbers in the military (about 11%).

VA Services for Return Veterans

- Postdeployment Health Reintegration Program
 - OEF/OIF/OND Care Management Program
 - Serving Returning Veterans Mental Health Program
 - Polytrauma/TBI Program
 - Caregiver Support Program
 - VITAL (Veterans Integration To Academic Leadership)
- Benefits for returning Veterans
 - 5 years of free health care for all issues related to their combat services

Additional Resources

- Suicide Prevention Hotline
- Vet Centers
- PTSD Apps for Smart Phones

www.afterdeployment.org

www.ncptsd.va.gov

www.istss.org

www.battlemind.org