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Teaching Post 9/11 Student Veterans with Symptoms of PTSD: The Influence of Faculty Perceptions and Self-Efficacy

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KEYWORDS: Post-traumatic stress disorder, PTSD and college, faculty perceptions of student veterans

RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS:

- Previous studies have shown that instructors with high levels of self-efficacy may be more likely to build relationships with students who experience difficulty associated with PTSD. This study aims to understand how perceptions of veterans and their military service influence instructor self-efficacy. This study is important because enrollment of veterans into higher education is expected to continue to increase as more veterans take advantage of the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill and some of these veterans might exhibit symptoms of PTSD.
- The two main findings are that a faculty member’s perception of military service is associated with the faculty member’s self-efficacy level; and, self-efficacy and faculty perceptions of student veterans have a measurable effect on the academic success of incoming student veterans who have symptoms of PTSD.
- Implications from this study include the recommendation that universities consider implementing self-efficacy training programs for faculty teaching student veterans.

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ABSTRACT:

“With the recent authorization of the GI bill and the continued military presence in Iraq and Afghanistan, institutions of higher education in the United States are expected to experience an influx of returning student-veterans, many who may have symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The purpose of the current study was to examine faculty perceptions of returning student-veterans who may have symptoms of PTSD. We surveyed 596 faculty members as to their views of serving in the military, the United States’ involvement in the Iraq/Afghanistan wars and perceptions of their ability or self-efficacy to address the special needs of combat veterans in the classroom. Results indicate that faculty perceptions about current military conflicts and the military itself may be associated with their self-efficacy to teach and work with returning student-veterans in the classroom.”

Implications

FOR PRACTICE

The success of achieving educational goals for student veterans suffering from symptoms of PTSD may be correlated with faculty members' self-efficacy level due to the unique learning needs of their students. Data regarding faculty members with negative feelings towards the post-9/11 conflicts and the service of student veterans was negatively associated with reported self-efficacy. This highlights a need for greater self-efficacy on the part of faculty to mitigate the effect of faculty attitudes towards military on educational outcomes. University campuses should implement training programs for faculty members that specifically focus on de-biasing faculty perspectives towards military service members and post-9/11 conflicts in order to better serve student veterans who have symptoms of PTSD. These de-biasing techniques may increase self-awareness for the faculty about the impact of their perceptions while providing them with the confidence to assist a student veteran who suffers from symptoms of PTSD through the appropriate means available. By acknowledging the various perceptions of military service faculty may have, administrators and faculty can collaborate through training to better separate personal feelings from self-efficacy in the classroom. Universities should encourage a collaborative understanding between student veterans and faculty members to assist in producing positive educational outcomes. Mental health counseling and student veteran offices on campus can provide knowledge about resources available for student veterans so faculty members are aware of where they can direct those who experience symptoms of PTSD.

FOR POLICY

The VA might consider providing colleges and universities with resources on how to best address the needs of student veterans with PTSD symptoms. Currently, the VA offers veterans several resources to assist in choosing a school and program that best suits the veteran, including career counseling. VA officials might consider incorporating in the G.I. Bill Comparison Tool information on supportive services each higher education institution offers to enrolled student veterans. The VA might form alliances and partnerships with universities to encourage student veterans with PTSD symptoms to seek receiving the services they need to succeed.

FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research should identify additional variables in this study that may affect the association with negative feelings about the military and lower levels of reported self-efficacy. Additionally, because this was a voluntary participation study, there may be selection bias of participants. Respondents who chose to participate may have had strong feelings one way or another regarding the military and the United States' involvement in post-9/11 conflicts. Future research should also strive to have a larger sample size, as the response to this study was relatively low; only an estimated 13.9% of all surveys were completed. Forthcoming studies should also evaluate the impact of negative perceptions of the military and self-efficacy based on the employment status of faculty; full-time, part-time, and adjunct professors could provide new insights to their experiences teaching post-9/11 student veterans. Future wording of survey items should also be considered as the terminology utilized may have also prompted negative reactions; the use of the term "suffering" may have invited biased responses when referring to student veterans who experienced symptoms of PTSD. In following studies, it would be beneficial to use more neutral words that have fewer negative feelings associated with them.

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