



DIFFERENTIAL SERVICE UTILIZATION OF TITAN WARRIOR WELLNESS (TWW) PROGRAM AMONGST SSM/V VS. MCS

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ABSTRACT

Research on the jarring and incongruous reality faced by former military personnel entering the world of academia juxtaposed against a backdrop of lived combat experiences points to the integrative challenges faced by student service members and military connected populations. The purpose of the program evaluation is to utilize quantitative data collected by the Veteran Resource Center (VRC) to determine the efficacy of the Titan Warrior Wellness (TWW) program in addressing the engagement barriers and documented resistance to mental health services from individuals with military service. In comparing the two populations (i.e., SSM/V and MCS) in terms of differential service utilization patterns and resulting feelings of connectedness to campus culture; researchers hope to identify influencing variables that might inform continuous programmatic improvement.

INTRODUCTION

Significance of Study:

The Veterans Resource Center (VRC) at California State University, Fullerton (CSUF), formerly known as Veterans Student Services (VSS) was established circa 2008 to address the growing need for supportive services for transitioning veterans entering the university environment and reintegrating to civilian life. The collision between military and civilian lived experience, between SSM/V and their peers result in perceptual and experiential differences that result in SSM/V feeling:

- Isolated
- Undervalued
- Academically frustrated

(Williams-Koltz and Gansemer-Topf, 2017).

A study examining 57 U.S. post-secondary institutions found greater levels of inferred stigma associated with mental health treatment seeking among military connected students when compared to their civilian counterparts (Currier et al., 2018).

Purpose of Study:

Research on the efficacy of psychosocial approaches taken by Veteran Resource Centers on university campuses lack operationalization leading to a plethora of qualitative research and a disproportionate availability of quantitative research (Ellison et al., 2012). Therefore, the purpose of the program evaluation is to utilize quantitative data collected by the VRC to determine the efficacy of the TWW program in addressing the engagement barriers and documented resistance to mental health services from individuals with military service.

Research Question:

Is there a difference in the service utilization of personal growth and development services/activities provided through the VRC TWW program amongst SSM/V and MCS?

Hypothesis:

In addition to answering the program evaluation question around differential utilization of TWW services amongst SSM/V and MCS, the evaluation includes a hypothesis that reflects an expected increase in utilization of TWW services from SSM/V when compared to their military connected counterparts (MCS).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Prevalence:

Military population-based surveys indicate high rates of underutilization of mental health services for those with the most need (Barry et al., 2012). One such study focusing on the student veteran population revealed that 9% to 45% met diagnostic screening criteria for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

LITERATURE REVIEW (Continued)

However, when those rates were compared to treatment utilization the results were dismal, representing only 1 out of 50 students sought treatment (Barry et al., 2012).

A Healthy Minds Study conducted from 2011 to 2015 comparing student SSM/V to their non-military connected peers (909 SSM/V and 1818 non-SSM/V), found that SSM/V reported treatment seeking stigma and negative beliefs around the efficacy and usefulness of psychological services and psychopharmacologic interventions (Currier et al., 2018).

Conversely, a national study examining mental health treatment utilization on college/university campuses (n = 706 student veterans) showed high levels of treatment utilization on college/university campuses as opposed to Department of Defense (DoD) and Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health care system (Albright et al., 2017).

Research Gaps:

These studies point to the need for mental health and wellness services dedicated to the student veteran population as SSM/V tend to lean on community-based services (Albright et al., 2017; Bonar et al., 2015). However, what is unknown is what effect the availability of dedicated campus services has on breaking the barriers to service utilization.

METHODS

Research Design:

The program evaluation is a secondary analysis of data provided by the Veterans Resource Center (VRC) at California State University (CSUF) and obtained through an annual assessment sent electronically to registered VRC participants.

Sample:

Unlike the program evaluation that compares SSM/V and MCS, the original study did not utilize comparison groups, rather it was a post-test survey design through non-probability convenience sampling.

Data from the 2019-2020 VRC assessment survey were comprised of actively enrolled SSM/V and MCS and administered to 1,414 students of which 427 students responded, establishing an approximated 33% response rate. (Note that of the 427 [n=427] respondents, only the 380 participants who identified as SSM/V or MCS were included in the sample for the program evaluation.)

Independent Variable:

SSM/V: Active-duty student service members and/or veterans currently enrolled at CSUF and registered with the VRC.

MCS: familial collaterals and various military connected individuals (e.g., military dependents, spouses, advocates, and/or allies of the military student population).

Dependent Variables:

Utilization of TWW Program - Drawn from 2019-2020 VRC Survey Questions:

Q42: "Did you participate in or engage with the Titan Warrior Wellness Program (TWW)?" **Q43:** "What TWW resources they participated or engaged in?"

Connectedness - Drawn from 2019-2020 VRC Survey Questions:

Q61 "I feel connected to the CSUF campus community"; Q62 "I feel a sense of belonging on the Cal State Fullerton Campus"; and Q68 "While attending CSUF, I still miss (missed) the camaraderie of the military lifestyle."

RESULTS

Chi Square Test:

A Chi-Square test was conducted to evaluate whether there was differential TWW utilization amongst SSM/V and MCS. There was no significant difference found between the two populations (SSM/V and MCS) utilization of TWW Program; rendering a null hypothesis.

Table 2

Differential TWW Utilization * Q28 How often have you visited the VRC at California State University Fullerton (N= 130)

| Participant Group | Frequency of Visits to the VRC | | | | |
|-------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------|------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|
| | Daily (f) % | Weekly (f) % | Monthly (f) % | Once a Semester (f) % | One Time (f) % |
| SSM/V | 15 (19.5) | 32 (41.6) | 21 (27.4) | 2 (2.6) | 60 (78) |
| MVS | 14 (18.2) | 30 (39) | 20 (26) | 3 (3.9) | 63 (81.9) |

Inferential Analysis: Efficacy of Program / Measured by reported Connectedness and Sense of Belonging

A statistical significance (x2 (3) = 11.77, p=.008) was identified for reported sense of connectedness between SSM/V and MCS (see Table 4) Results indicated that SSM/V were more likely to disagree with the statement: "I feel connected to the CSUF campus community" when compared to MCS.

Table 3

Differential TWW Utilization * Q61 "I feel connected to the CSUF campus community."

| Participant Group (N=160) | I feel connected to the CSUF campus community | | | | |
|---------------------------|---|-------------------------|------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|
| | Completely Agree (f) % | Somewhat Agree (f) % | Neutral (f) % | Somewhat Disagree (f) % | Completely Disagree (f) % |
| SSM/V (n= 105) | 6 (6.3) | 23 (24.2) | 14 (14.7) | 19 (19.9) | 43 (45.1) |
| MVS (n= 55) | 8 (44) | 9 (49.5) | 10 (5.5) | 12 (6.6) | 16 (8.8) |

*p > .05

DISCUSSION

Strengths & Limitations:

Results were consistent with previous studies indicating that SSM/V experience marginalization and lack of connectedness on university campuses (Currier et al., 2018). The survey assessment evaluated the utilization of several VRC resources including the VRC, however, the results did not yield information that could be used to evaluate the efficacy of the VRC. The instrumentation tool (i.e., 2019-2020 VRC Survey) should be revised to illicit responses that point to the efficacy of the various programs offered by the VRC and satisfaction levels amongst SSM/V and MCS.

Implications for Future Research:

Social work practice depends upon programs utilizing evidence based interventions, thus programmatic activities should be data informed. The 2020-2021 assessment, as opposed to the 2019-2020 survey, has the potential to yield valuable efficacy data if the survey assessment is restructured.