

SUDI CONFERENCE 2017

VETERANS' MENTAL HEALTH DISABILITIES AND EMPLOYMENT

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Let's Talk Numbers

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- ▶ 49.1 % participate in N.M. work force (employed or actively seeking work)
- ▶ N.M. ranks 31st for veteran labor participation
- ▶ Unemployment rate of N.M. veterans 5.5% in 2015
- ▶ N.M. unemployment rate ranks 48th in the nation; 41st for Veteran unemployment
- ▶ 19 % N.M. Veterans have a service-connected disability
- ▶ Younger cohort
- ▶ Lower incomes, educational attainment, and higher unemployment than other races
- ▶ Higher percentage have disability compared with our Veterans (36.4% versus 26.2%)

The New Mexico Department of Workforce Solutions,
Economic Research & Analysis Bureau.
Major contributor: Ashley Leach, Economist

U.S. Census Bureau, American
Community Survey, Public Use
Microdata Sample, 2010.

What is a Service-Connected Disability?

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- ▶ United States Department of Veterans Affairs defines service-connected disabilities as:
 - ▶ Groups based on disability
 - ▶ 0% is the least disabled
 - ▶ 100% is the most disabled
 - ▶ Of Veterans with service-connected disabilities, 40% have a rate of 70% or greater
 - ▶ Those with a rating of 20% or less comprise 25% of all Veterans with a service-connected disability

Prepared by the National Center for Veterans
Analysis and Statistics.

Matsunaga Study

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- ▶ Post-Vietnam study investigating Native American Veteran Experience
 - ▶ Southwest and Northern Plains
 - ▶ Higher levels of exposure to war zones
 - ▶ Readjustment affected by unique culture but did not cause or prevent PTSD
 - ▶ Found many joined military to gain education, jobs, and travel opportunities
 - ▶ Torn between traditional spiritual and community values and military expectation of aggression and killing

Matsunaga Study continued

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- ▶ Gaining and keeping employment, advancing education require the abilities most impaired by PTSD
- ▶ Veterans with PTSD: Bad jobs, keeping jobs, avoiding or impulsively departing "good jobs", difficulty in furthering education

Kulka, R.A., Schlenger, W.A., Fairbanks, J.A., Hough, R.L., Jordan, B.K., Marmar, C.R., Cranston, A.S. (1990). Trauma and the Vietnam War generation: Report of findings from the National Vietnam Veterans Readjustment Study. New York: Brunner/Mazel.

Friedman, M.J., Ashcraft, M.L., Beals, J.L., Keane, T.M., Manson, S.M., & Marsella, A.J. (1997). Matsunaga Vietnam Veterans Project (Volumes 1 and 2). National Center for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and National Center for American Indian and Alaska Native Mental Health Research.

Mental Health

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- ▶ Physical illness versus Emotional distress
- ▶ World Health Organization(2013) reports mental illness is a primary source of disability
- ▶ These individuals die decades before the general public from natural causes and greater numbers by accident and suicide (Colton & Manderscheid,2006)
- ▶ Economic harm due to unemployment
- ▶ Mental health affects cognitive and social functions, productivity, and life satisfaction (Nash et al., 2011)

Person-Centered Approach towards Veterans, Disability, and Employment

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- ▶ Not a character flaw
- ▶ Not a sign of weakness
- ▶ Negative effect of stigma
- ▶ Success based on person-centered approach and Veteran's level of acceptance and denial (Jackel, 2009)
- ▶ Conscious commitment to well-being is necessary (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA], n.d.)

Disabled Veterans Self-Perception as Employees

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- ▶ Negatively affects job performance
- ▶ Cause a need for position or occupation changes
- ▶ Undermined opportunities for advancement and greater responsibilities

Disabled Veterans' Employment Challenges

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- ▶ Risk of impulsive resignations (Jackel, 2009)
- ▶ Work success can be difficult (gaining employment, work performance, time holes in resume, job hopping [Gilbert & Marwaha, 2013], poor self-initiation, poor motivation, impulsive work-related decisions, and outbursts [Brogaard, 2013])
- ▶ May be frequently absent from work creating financial harm
- ▶ Psychotropic drugs may negatively affect cognition and work performance

To Tell or Not To Tell

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- ▶ Should a Veteran Disclose their disability?
- ▶ No clear answer
- ▶ Veteran needs to weigh risks and benefits

Goldberg, 2014

Success with Employment

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- ▶ It takes two: the Veteran and the work-place
- ▶ Barriers to success: inability to concentrate, staying on task and organized can be difficult,
- ▶ What can supervisors do? Remove distractions, environmental white noise machines, natural light, daily task lists, electronic organizers, breaking larger projects into smaller pieces, use of written requests to ensure understanding and form a visual cue, not allowing interpersonal work issues to build, focus on solutions and not personalities, be sensitive to the manner constructive criticism is stated

(Goldberg, 2014)

Success with Employment cont.

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- ▶ Allow Veterans to leave the workplace for exercise, health-related education (stress reduction, self-care), and provide employee assistance programs to promote well-being (Healey & Zimmerman, 2010)

Legal Protections at Work

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- ▶ Americans with Disabilities Act may offer protections from discrimination if the Veteran meets the federal definitions of disabled "a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities of an individual; a record of such impairment; or being regarded as having such an impairment (ADA.gov, 2010, p.35)
- ▶ Family and Medical Leave Act

What Assistance Can Be Provided?

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- ▶ New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services
- ▶ Native American Veterans Association (NAVA)
- ▶ VA's Compensated Work Therapy (CWT)
- ▶ VA's Vocational and Rehabilitation and Employment Program (VR&E) for Veterans with service-connected disabilities
- ▶ New Mexico Department of Workforce Solutions Workforce Transition Services Division (WTSD) and Workforce Connection Centers
- ▶ Translate military skills to civilian skills that can be used to update resumes