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Program Evaluation and Research Unit

# Student Veterans

*Mental Health and Academic Performance*



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# Presenter Info



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# Learning Objectives

**By the end of this module, you will be able to do the following:**

- Describe the student veteran subpopulation
- Define stressors associated with student veteran experiences
  - Describe the role of transition and community
- Describe the role of gratitude as a protective factor
- Identify supportive services for student Veterans



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# Is gratitude associated with suicidal ideation in Student Veterans with PTSD symptoms?

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*Umucu et al. (2022)*



# Article overview and research

- The article aimed to identify the effect of gratitude as an adaptive regulating mechanism from suicidal ideation (SI) for student veterans with posttraumatic stress disorder(PTSD) symptoms.
- Positive psychology (PP) is an emerging theory concerned with building the qualities and experiences that enhances psychological well-being
  - Gratitude has been proven to buffer the relationship among depression, hopelessness, and SI.



# Article overview and research

- A survey was shared with the student veteran office at the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP), where they distributed the survey link via e-mail and social media to student veterans.
  - Veterans over the age of 18, enrolled at UTEP and have PTSD symptoms- 232
- Questions included SI, depression and gratitude



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# Stressors among Student Veterans

- Lack of support and understanding due to undiagnosed depression
- Family issues
- Physical health difficulties (e.g., disabilities)
- Discomfort on campus (i.e., feelings of being judged/not fitting in)
- Feelings of burdensomeness and hopelessness brought by mental health conditions and symptoms



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# Role of Transition and Community

- Peer mentorship programs
  - Increasing sense of belongingness
- Increasing availability/accessibility of specific & appropriate supports
- Culturally sensitive programming
- Gatekeeper training for campus faculty/staff and students who interact frequently with Student Veterans
- Removing stigma surrounding mental health challenges



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# Role of Gratitude

- Gratitude: noticing and appreciating the positive aspects of life
- Counteracts effect of depression
- Protective factor against PTSD symptoms
- Associated with autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, purpose in life, and self-acceptance
- Promotes and strengthens social support
- Improves positive emotion, job satisfaction, well-being



# Gratitude Interventions

- Gratitude diary
  - Listing things one feels grateful for
- Gratitude visit
  - Writing a letter & delivering to someone who they feel grateful for but had not properly thanked the person for before
- Guided gratitude reflection
  - Focusing on one thing one feels grateful for



# Main Findings

- Suicide ideation was positively associated with depression scores.
- Suicide ideation was negatively associated with gratitude scores.
- Gratitude was not associated with depression scores.



# Research limitations

- Study was two different cross-sectional designs; therefore, there remains a question concerning possible bidirectionality in the relationship between gratitude and SI
- Used a single item to measure SI
- Sample consisted of those with self-reported mental illnesses and those with PTSD symptoms



# Discussion

- What kind of supportive services do you think can assist with implementing this kind of activity?
- How can gratitude interventions reach Student Veterans who are at high risk of suicide and do not access mental health services?
- Thoughts on incorporating gratitude screening with suicide screening?



# References

- Umucu, E., Lo, C.-L., Lee, B., Vargas-Medrano, J., Diaz-Pacheco, V., Misra, K., Martin, S. L., Thompson, P. M., & Gadad, B. S. (2022). Is gratitude associated with suicidal ideation in veterans with mental illness and student veterans with PTSD symptoms? *Journal of Nervous & Mental Disease*, 210(1), 26-31. <https://doi.org/10.1097/nmd.0000000000001406>



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