The War On Stigma: Examining Mental Illness Stigma in the U.S. Military

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The War On Stigma: Examining Mental Illness Stigma in the U.S. Military
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Introduction
● Current research suggests up to 43% of United States and 37% of United Kingdom troops returning home from war have experienced some type of mental health issue(s) (Iversen, Staden, Hughes et al., 2009; Sareen, Cox, Afifi et al., 2007).
● 60% of military personnel who experience mental health problems do not seek help, yet many of them could benefit from professional treatment (Sharp et al., 2014).
● Previous research has failed to examine the specific mental health needs and well-being of active-duty personnel, while only a breadth of previous literature exists examining stigma toward mental health in the military (Acosta et al., 2014; Britt et al., 2007; Sharp et al., 2014).

PURPOSE:
To examine first-hand, active, and inactive military personnel experiences with mental illness and the quality of mental health services provided to these individuals.

Methods
Participants
● 146 participants were recruited via FHSU’s Military and Family Friendly Committee and Amazon Mechanical Turk.
● Of these 146 participants, 93 were male, 52 were female.
● The mean age of participants was 32.96 (SD = 8.85).
● Ethnicity: 71 Caucasian, 5 African American, 55 Asian/Pacific Islander, 6 Hispanic, 3 Native American/Alaskan native, and 5 other.
● Military Branch: 59 Army, 37 Navy, 15 Marines, 16 Air Force, 16 National Guard.

Methodology
● Participation consisted of an online survey developed using Survey Monkey.
● Measures for this survey included both basic and military based demographics.
● A self-constructed scale was developed by researchers. Responses were measured on a 5-point-Likert scale and measured how readily available mental health services were to participants and their perceptions of mental illness while holding active duty status.
● The Attitudes about Child Mental Health Questionnaire (ACMHQ) was adapted and utilized (Heflinger, Wallston, Mukolo, & Brannan, 2014).

Results
● An independent samples t-test was performed to assess whether perceived stereotypes and attitudes towards those with a mental illness differed significantly between 93 males and 52 females. According to the results, men (M = 2.86, SD = 1.23) endorsed more stereotypes toward those with a mental illness more frequently than women (M = 3.29, SD = 1.32), t(144) = -1.98, p = .05. Additionally, men (M = 2.60, SD = 0.88) report greater stigmatic attitudes towards those with a mental illness more frequently than women (M = 2.93, SD = 1.44), t(144) = -2.14, p = .03.

Discussion
● Results indicate that both men and women hold some stigmatic views towards those diagnosed with a mental illness. In addition, participants of higher age had a lower perceived stigma when compared to participants of younger age.
● There were no differences found between military branches and the lack of mental health services (Army, Air Force, Marines, Navy, & National Guard).
● Although lack of mental health services between branches did not differ, based on qualitative responses 55% of the participants felt negatively towards seeking out mental health services.
○ In support of previous research, participants more often than not have negative attitudes towards seeking out mental health services when employed with the U.S. military (Johnson et al., 2007; Britt et al., 2008, Sharp et al., 2015).
● Future research ought to examine specific barriers to seeking out mental health services, as well as the quality of mental health training given to officers of higher power and whether or not they implement this training effectively.