

Veteran College Students' Mental Health and Academic Achievement

The ACHIEVES Study

Team Members:

Samantha Brandfon

Becky Clive

Marcia Valenstein

Heather Walters



Funding:

*May 1, 2013-April 30-2017
(pending funding notice)*

Length of Study:

5 years

Anticipated Impacts on Veterans Health:

This study will produce the first rigorous assessment of mental health symptoms and hazardous alcohol use in Veteran students, a high priority population for the VA. Obtaining these data is a critical first step if the VA and colleges are to make informed decisions regarding optimal **resource allocation** for outreach efforts, the **types of interventions** that might be needed and desired by this target population, and **the attributes of colleges** where such interventions might be most needed and have the broadest impact. This study will also produce the first assessment of the link between Veteran student mental health and academic performance.

Project Background:

Mental health symptoms are highly prevalent among Veterans returning from the current conflicts.(2)(3)(4)A recent study of a convenience sample also reported startlingly high rates of mental health issues and suicidal ideation among Veteran college students, exceeding those observed among OEF/OIF Veterans seeking VA care.(5) In addition, several small studies have reported links between non-Veteran student mental health, poor college performance, and failure to graduate.(6)

Project Objectives:

Our objectives are to: assess the prevalence of mental health symptoms, hazardous alcohol use, and levels of wellbeing among a *representative* sample of Veteran and comparison college students. We will also assess mental health treatment use, treatment preferences, perceived treatment barriers, and academic performance. We will next assess *relationships* between mental health, treatment use, and academic performance. Finally, we will explore Veteran and comparison student work status and functioning when work is concurrent with studies and during college “stop outs”.

Study Design:

Data for this study will primarily come from surveys of a representative sample of Veteran students and comparison students, supplemented by 1) surveys of college administrators; 2) academic administrative data, and 3) VHA healthcare data for Veteran students providing additional consent. A stratified cluster sample design will be used to select Veteran and comparison college students for the student survey. Sixty colleges and 2580 Veteran and comparison students within these institutions will be selected. Baseline and one and two year follow up surveys will assess well-being, mental health symptoms, alcohol use, social and academic integration, and treatment use. Data on GPA and stop out from enrollment will be assessed. Univariate, bivariate, and multivariate analyses of quantitative data will address study aims.

Potential Impact:

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Problem

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