Beyond Basic Military Awareness: Cultural Competence in Working with Military Affiliated Populations

Presented by Duane K. L. France, MA, MBA, LPC

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WEBINAR PRESENTER

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WEBINAR LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Describe the cultural aspects of military service, and how cultural aspects impact the worldview of the military affiliated population

2. Recognize and understand the explicit and implicit characteristics of military culture and how they impact service members, veterans, and their families

3. Articulate how culture impacts transition into and out of the military lifestyle and how this impacts individuals in post-military life
Purpose and Meaning

Emotion Dysregulation

Addiction

TBI

PTSD

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CORE CLINICAL COMPETENCIES FOR TREATING SERVICE MEMBERS, VETERANS, AND THEIR FAMILIES (REVIEW)

Military Culture represents general information about the functioning and worldview of military service members and their families.

Ethics represents counselors' self-awareness and motivation to serve military-connected clients, as well as ethical considerations working with military populations.

Assessment of Presenting Concerns represents common areas of clinical concern that service members frequently present to mental health services to address.

Identity Development represents the whole person concept of military life including one's personal identity as a service member and connection to mission and core values of working in a high-risk occupation across the lifespan.

Treatment represents general information about unique issues that may arise in the treatment of military-affiliated clients and approaches supported by research for military populations, including best practices of military care systems, as well as holistic, wellness-oriented services.

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POLLING QUESTION #1

Assimilation into military culture and lifestyle can have a lasting impact on service members and their families

A. Strongly Agree
B. Agree
C. Neither Agree or Disagree
D. Disagree
E. Strongly Disagree

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NAADAC Specialty Training Series: Addiction Treatment in Military and Veteran Culture
Part 4 of 6

CULTURE DEFINED
Anything that defines the characteristics of a culture — ways of dressing, language, conceptualization of the world — applies to the military

- The integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behavior that depends upon the capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations.
- The characteristic features of everyday existence shared by people in a place or time.
- The set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterizes an institution or organization.

SPECTRUM OF CULTURAL COMPETENCE
Cultural competence needs to be seen as a continuum from basic cultural awareness to cultural competence; effort must be made to move beyond knowledge towards cultural sensitivity and competence (Adams, 1999).

Cultural Awareness
- Developing sensitivity and understanding of another ethnic group. Cultural awareness must be supplemented with cultural knowledge.

Cultural Knowledge
- Familiarization with selected cultural characteristics, history, values, belief systems, and behaviors of the members of another ethnic group.

Cultural Sensitivity
- Has the ability to be appropriately responsive to the attitudes, feelings, circumstances of groups of people that share a common and distinct racial, national, religious, linguistic, or cultural heritage.

Cultural Competence
- Can function effectively and appropriately in diverse cultural interaction and settings.

CULTURE DIFFERENCES
Recognizes the unique within group cultural differences of Service members including gender, race, ethnicity, age, education, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, ability-status, and religious/spiritual orientation (Department of Defense, 2017).

- Among enlisted recruits, 43 percent of men and 56 percent of women are Hispanic or a racial minority.
- Women represent 36 percent of the enlisted forces across branches and 18 percent of the officer corps.
- Enlisted recruits across the military join the military from neighborhoods where the median income is between $40k and $84k a year.
- Age distribution varies between branches: enlistees below the age of 20 made up 84% of USMC, 65% of USAF and USA, and 87% of USN.

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RESOURCES BY COMPONENT
Understands the potential for variance in the resources and support systems available to different components of the military (Active Duty vs. Reserve Component)

• Active Duty service members serve in specific locations around the U.S. and overseas and have the military as their full-time occupation
• All branches of the military have a Reserve component, as well as each state has a National Guard and Air National Guard component
• As of 2014, over 800,000 National Guard and Reserve service members deployed in support of the Global War on Terror
• Non-activated guard and reserve service members, from non-combat eras, not eligible for VA services (Polusny et al., 2016)

POLLING QUESTION #2
Explicit characteristics of the military lifestyle can create a separate experience for those who served from those who haven't
A. Strongly Agree
B. Agree
C. Neither Agree or Disagree
D. Disagree
E. Strongly Disagree

EXPLICIT CULTURAL DIFFERENCES
Explicit characteristics of military culture are those observable characteristics that make military life unique. Manner of dress, branch and era of service, era of service, and rank structure are all examples of explicit characteristics of the SMVF population

• Able to recognize different branches of service and differences in the characteristics of each
• Differences between current and former service members, as well as former service members from different eras
• Knowledge about different military operations, current and former, as well as differences between combat theaters within conflicts (i.e., Iraq vs. Afghanistan, Pacific vs. European theaters of operation)
EXPLICIT CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Can identify the Active Duty service branches of the U.S. armed forces, and understands that each branch adheres to specialized structures, roles, ranks, and terms and is aware that differences in military culture exist between each branch of service:

- U.S. Army: the main ground force of the U.S., largest and oldest of all of the branches
- U.S. Air Force: the air and space branch of the military, began as Army Air Corps
- U.S. Navy: the naval force of the U.S., delivers combat forces while maintaining security at sea
- U.S. Marine Corps: An amphibious and ground expeditionary force
- U.S. Coast Guard: a maritime component; law enforcement branch and military branch

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EXPLICIT CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Is aware that differences in experiences may exist between Veterans who previously served and Service members/Veterans who currently serve, as well as Veterans who served in different eras (DeBruyne & Leland, 2015):

- The military changes significantly over a short period of time; serving in 1995 was different than in 2005, which was different in 2015, etc.
- Military is an inherently dangerous occupation, with possible trauma and stress occurring even in times of "peace"
- According to a 2015 Congressional Research Service Report, the total number of U.S. Active Duty Military deaths in 1980 was 2,392, as opposed to 1,485 in 2010.

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EXPLICIT CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Seeks education on the training methods and objectives of military operations, including potential differences among combat zones:

- A service member’s experience in Iraq in 2010 is completely different than another service member’s experience in the Persian Gulf War in 1991
- Technology, resources, method of combat differ from era to era and theater to theater
- A single service member, especially career military members, likely served in multiple conflicts; WWII and Korea, Korea and Vietnam, Vietnam and Persian Gulf War, Gulf War, Balkans, and GWOT

Potential Combat Conflicts:
- World War II
- Vietnam War
- Korea
- Lebanon
- Grenada
- Desert Storm/ Desert Shield
- Bosnia
- Kosovo
- Operations in the former Yugoslavia area
- Global War on Terrorism
- Operation Enduring Freedom
- Operation Freedom's Sentinel
- Operation Iraq Freedom
- Operation New Dawn

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Implicit characteristics of military culture are the underlying values and unwritten norms of behavior that are associated with military service. Just as important as explicit characteristics, these tend to remain in the veteran population after a service member is no longer in the military.

• Assimilation into the military culture inculcates values, beliefs, and traditions that impact an individual’s world view
• Military is a mission-focused, results-oriented organization
• Service members internalize military values such as sacrifice, honor, humility, collective effort, and a desire to limit risk or harm to others
IMPLICIT CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

A mental health professional needs to acknowledge that values, beliefs, traditions, and functions of the military can influence the client's worldview. A particular worldview is a distinct philosophy of life or experiences within social, cultural, environmental, and psychological domains (Weiss & Coll, 2011).

- Military servicemembers and their families have more of a global perspective than those who have never served, due to multiple duty assignments
- All branches have a commitment to the value of service and sacrifice
- Exposure to trauma or stressful situations outside the common experience of those who didn’t serve can negatively impact values (moral injury)

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IMPLICIT CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Is aware of the mission-first, process- and results-oriented value system of the military. A unified effort towards a common goal (macro or micro) is a significant part of establishing a cohesive collective culture. This is even translated to military spouses and children who operate in “everything else comes first” conditions

- Service members and their families experience a unique set of stressors, such as isolation from family of origin, frequent moves, and unpredictable changes, undertaken for the needs of the military and mission
- Putting mission before self can lead to a loss of personal identity and identity focused on military role
- A personal stake in the accomplishment of goals can lead to accepting an inordinate amount of responsibility for perceived failures

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IMPLICIT CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Acknowledges sacrifice, honor, and humility as values for Service members. Recognizes the importance of collectivism within the military culture, including a desire to limit risk or harm to others. This can impact their ability and willingness to seek mental health support for perceived weaknesses and a desire to protect others (Meyler & Wynn, 2018)

- Assimilation into military culture, either brief, short or long term, can lead to an indelible culturalization that is most significant in a veteran’s life
- Seeking care for mental health concerns can be seen as mission compromising and an admission that they are unreliable
- Often, service members and veterans will be reticent to disclose details, not to avoid reliving the trauma, but to “protect” the therapist from feeling what the veteran is feeling

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POLLLING QUESTION #4

The reasons for transitioning into and out of the military lifestyle are many and varied, and require a flexible approach to individual clients.

A. Strongly Agree  
B. Agree  
C. Neither Agree or Disagree  
D. Disagree  
E. Strongly Disagree

CULTURAL IMPACTS ON TRANSITION

Acculturation into the military lifestyle impacts service members and their spouses, as well as to children and other family members. Understanding the challenges related to cultural dissonance is important for providers. The in-group / out-group nature of military service forms a psychological divide between those who served and those who haven’t.

• Not all cultural assimilation is the same for service members, so providers need to explore the individual client’s response to military culture.
• Clinicians must understand the different reasons why individuals join or leave the military, and their feelings towards these decisions.
• There is a need to acknowledge and address the differing worldviews of those who served and those who haven’t.

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CULTURAL IMPACTS ON TRANSITION

Providers must explore the introjection of military culture in the client’s personal and professional functioning. Although the veteran no longer exhibits the explicit characteristics of the military, their implicit characteristics are maintained and sometimes strengthened, such as the value of collectivism in the military versus the value of individual achievement.

• Military culture emphasizes working as a team, while non-military employment culture is often focused on individual achievement and skills.
• Inability to adapt to a different point of view can cause resentment and the feeling that military skills are not valued in post-military life.
• The need to make a cultural shift is not as emphasized during transition programs as is the development of skills and processes (Trussa & Castro, 2019).

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CULTURAL IMPACTS ON TRANSITION

Respects the individual motivations of service members to enlist or commission in the military, as well as their individual experiences during their time in service and decision to leave or retire from the military. Service members show diversity in their reasons for why they join and leave the military, which branch they join, and how these impact how they view their service.

- Reasons for joining the military can be identified by themes (Redmond et al., 2015)
- Institutional: desire to serve, patriotism, desire for adventure/challenge
- Future-oriented: desire for a military career and money for college
- Occupational: desire to support family, best available option
- Pecuniary: repayment of college loans and bonuses

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CULTURAL IMPACTS ON TRANSITION

Is aware of the potential for differing worldviews between Service members and civilians. In 2011, nearly 75% of those who served and those who haven’t served in the military agreed that the American public does not understand the military experience, the characteristics of military personnel, and military culture

- A comparatively small number of Americans serve in the military; the current and former service members only account for 6% of the national population
- This gap in understanding can increase difficulties for service members and their families leaving military culture
- Addressing the civilian-military divide is seen to have political ramifications as well as a national security concern (Smith, 2018)

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“ONE VETERAN I SPEWED WITH HAD INTERVIEWED FOR SEVERAL JOBS IN THE SAME INDUSTRY WITHOUT SUCCESS. HE ATTRADED THIS TO HUMAN RESOURCES PEOPLE BEING BIAS AGAINST VETERANS. WHEN I POINTED OUT HIS NEGATIVE ATTITUDE TOWARD CIVILIANS AND ASKED IF HE THOUGHT HE HAD HIDDEN IT FROM THE INTERVIEWERS, HE ACONIONSIZED, ‘THEY PROBABLY PICKED UP ON IT. WOULD YOU HAVE SOMEONE YOU FELT HAD A BAD ATTITUDE TOWARD YOU?’ I ASKED. HE SAID, ‘I WOULD NOT. YET HE PERCEIVED IN HUMAN CIVILIANS, RATHER THAN HOLDING HIMSELF ACCOUNTABLE FOR HIS ATTITUDE.’

- NAVY CHAPLAIN
  LCDR KEVIN S. BEMEL

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# REFERENCES


Addiction Treatment in Military & Veteran Culture: Specialty Training Series

Addiction Treatment in Military & Veteran Culture Part One: Separating Those Who Served - Substance Use and Comorbid Mental Health for Military-Attached Populations
- Presenter: Andrew L. New
- Wednesday, October 24, 2018
- Free webinar

Addiction Treatment in Military & Veteran Culture Part Two: Separating Life After Service - Addiction and Transition to Military Life
- Presenter: Andrew L. New
- Wednesday, November 7, 2018
- Free webinar

Addiction Treatment in Military & Veteran Culture Part Three: Mental Health in Active Service: How Clinicians Can Address Mental Health Needs of Service Members, Veterans, and Their Families
- Presenter: Andrew L. New
- Wednesday, December 5, 2018
- Free webinar

American Addiction in Military & Veteran Culture Part Four: Beyond Basic Military Awareness - Cultural Competence in Working with Military Affiliated Populations
- Presenter: Susan M. (A.A.C.); Commandant, Castle 42
- Wednesday, January 2, 2019
- Free webinar

Addiction Treatment in Military & Veteran Culture Part Five: Identifying Promising Practices - Assessment Competencies for Service Members, Veterans, and Their Families
- Presenter: Andrew L. New
- Wednesday, February 6, 2019
- Free webinar

Addiction Treatment in Military & Veteran Culture Part Six: Using What Works - A Review of Evidence-Based Treatments for Military Populations
- Presenter: Andrew L. New
- Wednesday, March 6, 2019
- Free webinar

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4. Email CE@naadac.org if you experience any difficulty with this process.

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