

Volume 4, Issue 2

**Special Issue:  
Counseling the Military and Their Families**

*The Professional Counselor*  
**DIGEST**



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## Volume 4, Issue 2

### Special Issue: Counseling the Military and Their Families

Dr. Stephen Sharp, Guest Editor

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# Counselors and the Military: When Protocol and Ethics Conflict – DIGEST

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**T**he American Community Survey estimated that 21.5 million veterans live in the United States. A reported 1.6 million veterans served in the Gulf War operations that began post-9/11 in 2001. Pre-9/11 data suggested that 11% of military service members utilized mental health services in the year 2000. In 2003, post-9/11 comparative data reported that 19% of veterans deployed to Iraq accessed mental health services within one year of return. Recognizing the increased need for mental health assessment, the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) mandated the Post-Deployment Health Assessment (PDHA) for all returning service members. One study reported that veterans present with mental health symptoms related to post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and suicidal ideation, and they are most likely to access mental health services 3–4 months post-deployment. Studies indicated that mental health service needs are underestimated among the military

population and therefore a potential burden to an understaffed helping profession system. It is evident that the veteran population remain at risk for problems related to optimal mental health functioning and therefore require assistance from trained helping professionals.

Historically, the DOD employed social workers and psychologists almost exclusively to provide mental health services in the military setting. Recently, the DOD and U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) expanded services and created more job positions for mental health clinicians. Because licensed professional counselors (LPCs) are now employable by VA service providers (e.g., VA hospitals) and approved TRICARE providers, it is imperative to develop an understanding of the military system, especially the potential conflict that may exist between military protocol and counselor ethical guidelines. The military health system requires mental health profes-



sionals to be appropriately credentialed (e.g., licensed), and credentialing results in the mandatory adherence to a set of professional ethical standards. Professional ethical standards may not always align with military regulations. Thus, an analysis of the counselor ethical codes relevant to the military population is presented. At times, discrepancies between military protocol and counselor ethical codes may emerge; therefore, recommendations for navigating such ethical dilemmas are provided. A case study and analysis from the perspective of two ethical decision-making models are presented.

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# Revolving Doors: The Impact of Multiple School Transitions on Military Children – DIGEST

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Approximately 1.85 million school-age children have one or both parents serving in the U.S. military, and 90% of these children attend public schools that are not sponsored by the Department of Defense. On average, military children move three times more often than their civilian peers, relocating every 1–4 years. As such, relocation becomes a consistent stressor in the lives of military families, and it may negatively impact students' ability to make friends, to succeed academically, and to receive the support they need. School-age military children are especially vulnerable to the stress related to frequent transitions, as they must simultaneously cope with normal developmental stressors such as puberty, establishing peer relationships, conflict in parent/child relationships, and increased academic demands. The emotional stress of

relocation could be further complicated if the military parent is deployed or at risk of being deployed. These additional stressors in conjunction with multiple school transitions can affect the children's adaption to new school environments, both positively and negatively.

Multiple school transitions experienced by military children can negatively impact the students' social, emotional and academic success. These challenges include tension at home and parental deployment, slow transfer of records and differences in curriculum between schools, adapting to a new school environment and making new friends, limited access to extracurricular activities, and a lack of understanding of military culture among school teachers and staff. Almost all of these stressors are related to school environment. School culture, poli-



cies and procedures, and administration and staff can have a considerable influence on the ability of military children to cope with transition.

Although the majority of the literature discusses the damaging consequences multiple school transitions have on children from military families, some studies found that multiple school transitions fostered strength and resiliency, especially when the children had supportive relationships and environments. Multiple transitions may increase adaptability of military children, accelerate their maturity, help them develop a deeper appreciation for cultural differences, and strengthen their social skills. Researchers have noted that the

positive or negative academic and emotional effects of transition on military children depend largely upon their support systems. School counselors are ideal sources of support for military children, due to their education, their working relationships with other school staff, and the various roles they play within the school system. This article offers a comprehensive literature review on the challenges mobile military students face and the ways that school counselors can act on their behalf.

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# Wounded Warriors with PTSD: A Compilation of Best Practices and Technology in Treatment – DIGEST

Mary Alice Fernandez  
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## A U T H O R S

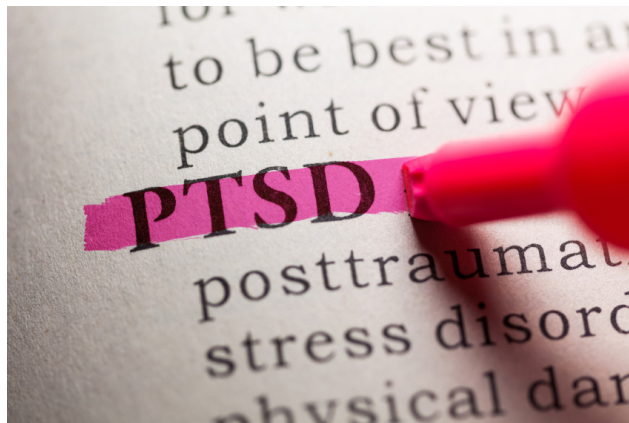
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Counselors working with combat veterans are in a unique position to honor our heroes. Combat veterans have offered the supreme sacrifice and some are paying a price for it with combat post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The task of providing mental health services to a growing veteran population and immediate family members is daunting, due to the lack of accessible services and the complexities of the disorder.

This article offers an overview of resources available to mental health counselors to assess, case-conceptualize, diagnose and treat a growing population of combat veterans with PTSD. The goal is to bring awareness of new therapies as well as best practices in treating combat PTSD to both beginning counselors and more experienced counselors. The compilation of resources begins with diagnostic criteria;

assessment tools; evidence-based practices, including new technologies for treating PTSD; and culminates with a list of Web sites available to counselors and veterans.

Making a diagnosis of PTSD requires assessment of symptoms, a structured interview, and knowledge of the client to make an evaluative judgment that leads to the development





of a sound treatment plan. Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is unanimously endorsed as the best-practice treatment for PTSD by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Department of Defense (DOD). Prolonged Exposure (PE) therapy, also supported by the VA, is an evidence-based practice for many types of trauma, including PTSD. Among a growing number of therapies are pet therapy, art therapy, exercise therapy, spiritual therapy (e.g., Heroes to Heroes), and virtual reality therapy. New technologies include comprehensive, well-developed, user-friendly tools to self-monitor PTSD symptoms and mood tracking; and a mobile application to work in tandem with a counselor for PE therapy. The resources identified can be readily accessed by counselors and veterans to begin the therapeutic journey.

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# The Implications of Attachment Theory for Military Wives: Effects During a Post-Deployment Period – DIGEST

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From 2001–2012, the U.S. government sent 2.4 million soldiers to Iraq and Afghanistan. According to Demers, deployments affected not only the soldiers' lives, but also the lives of their stay-behind wives (over half of U.S. soldiers reported being married). The purpose of the current research was to examine Bowlby's and Ainsworth's attachment theories—specifically separation anxiety—and its application to the experiences of military wives. Robertson and Bowlby further discussed the idea of separation anxiety and posited that an infant experiences three phases when separated from its mother: protest, despair, and denial or detachment. These phases of separation anxiety may be assimilated to the attachment issues that military wives experience throughout the stages of deployment.

The first stage of separation anxiety, protest, could be linked to the stages of pre-deployment and deployment when the wives may feel numb, angry and abandoned due to the separation. The second phase of separation anxiety, despair, could be assimilated to the grief and mourning the wives experience during deployment. Finally, military wives could experience denial and detachment during both deployment



and the post-deployment stage. The post-deployment stage is particularly important because when the husband returns home, the couple must evaluate how to reconnect, communicate and regain a relationship with one another.

In an attempt to understand this phenomenon, the authors used a qualitative research design and a volunteer purposive sampling strategy to examine the relationship between duration of deployment and psychological distress levels for wives during post-deployment. The authors chose the post-deployment stage for the timing of the study, due to the challenges that occur for military couples as they attempt to regain an attachment with one another. For this study, the authors defined post-deployment as the one-year period after a husband returns from a deployment.

The results of a linear regression analysis identified the positive correlation between duration of deployment and psychological distress. This psychological distress may impact the attachment between the stay-behind wife and her husband.

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# Assessing the Career-Development Needs of Student Veterans: A Proposal for Career Interventions – DIGEST

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**S**tudent veterans often encounter unique challenges related to career development. The significant number of student veterans entering postsecondary environments requires counselors who address the career development of this population to decide on appropriate areas of focus when developing interventions. This study utilized a career-needs assessment survey to determine the needs of student veterans in a university setting. The sample of student veterans was obtained from a large southeastern university. Student veterans indicated a desire to focus on the following topics within career intervention: transitioning military experience to civilian work, developing skills in résumé-building and networking, and negotiating job offers. Student veterans indicated a preference for participating in a group counseling

intervention focusing on the aforementioned concerns. Results of the needs survey can be used in the development of a career-related intervention.

Cognitive Information Processing provides a framework in which to address the career-development needs of this population. This theoretical approach focuses on domains of knowledge (self and options), decision making, and executive processing (negative thinking). Cognitive Information Processing, which has been examined in relation to veterans' career development, is utilized in the creation of a group counseling format incorporating the responses of the needs assessment. The group counseling format involves four sessions and focuses on transitioning military experience to civilian work as well as other



elements of student veterans' career development. Assessments are used to determine participants' pre- and post-group perceptions of their career development in order to determine change related to the intervention.

The authors also discuss the benefits of assessing needs prior to developing interventions. Implications for practice and research include balancing general and practical elements of career development in career interventions for student veterans, and enhancing service delivery through collaboration between student veterans' centers and career centers. The importance of utilizing evidence-based career-development theories is also discussed. In addition, the identification of several of the respondents as distance learners indicates a need for developing Web-based career interventions. Efficiency and effectiveness in addressing the career-development needs of veterans is critically important, given the limited resources for assisting the veteran population. Though this study focused on career-related issues of student veterans, assessing perceived needs and adapting interventions accordingly will ensure that professionals can fully attend to the needs of this population.

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# Military Veterans' Midlife Career Transition and Life Satisfaction – DIGEST

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This study, based on data from a dissertation, examined 136 midlife military veterans, with an average age of 51. The veterans had previously transitioned, or were in the process of transitioning, to K–12 teaching positions in the civilian sector. The research intended to examine how life satisfaction can be explained by internal (e.g., self-confidence) and external (e.g., support from others) career transition factors. Focusing on life satisfaction among midlife career changers and military members transitioning to teaching, the authors chose the following research question to guide the study: To what extent is the life satisfaction of military members who are transitioning or have transitioned to teaching explained by the five career transition factors of readiness, confidence, control, perceived support and decision independence?

Schlossberg's "A Model for Analyzing Human Adaptation to Transition" was used as a framework for the research. The research

utilized the Career Transitions Inventory (CTI), the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) and demographic questions. The CTI examines the five career transition factors: readiness (preparedness), confidence (belief in one's ability to manage the process), control (individual input and influence over the process), perceived support (from other important members of the person's life) and decision independence (impact of one's decisions on others). Two transition variables, confidence ( $r = .23$ ) and control ( $r = .31$ ), demonstrated slight yet statistically significant positive correlations to life satisfaction. Of the five predictor variables, control was the only transition variable found to explain life satisfaction. Control was found to account for 10% of the variance in life satisfaction. Combined, control and readiness explained approximately 16% of the variance in life satisfaction. None of the other career transition variables (confidence, support, decision independence) added any statistically significant value to explain life satisfaction.



Recommendations for further research and counseling practice are discussed, specifically the manner in which counselors can utilize veterans' confidence and control to help them navigate the transition process. The primary limitation of the study was a large number of respondents were in the post-transition phase. Counselors can help clients identify areas of control that are present before, during and after the transition. Also, counselors can address confidence of the military member before, during and after the transition process. Counselors can help clients assess their readiness for the military-to-civilian career transition, including both emotional and practical preparation.

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# Using a Cognitive Information Processing Approach to Group Career Counseling with Visually Impaired Veterans – DIGEST

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## A U T H O R

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Unemployment continues to be a growing concern for many individuals across the United States. Reports currently indicate that 14% of veterans identify as disabled and attribute this disability to their service in the armed forces. Because of service- and nonservice-related reasons, accommodating and developing specialized interventions for veterans is an increasing need for this population. In the case of career counseling, additional barriers to employment for disabled or impaired veterans may present themselves in the form of beliefs or assumptions about searching for a new occupation or the ability to obtain a job. Barriers to employment such as visual impairment can create an outlook that may be characterized by negative thinking, lowered confidence in finding a career and making a career decision, and even avoiding self-evaluation regarding what the veteran has to offer a civilian employer. VA Blind Rehabilitation Centers (BRC) use holistic treatment approaches in promoting improved quality

of life for veterans with visual impairments. Evidence from research on implementation and delivery of services continues to suggest that using group approaches to treatment across demographics provides additional therapeutic qualities. Veterans report feeling supported and encouraged when they are exposed to others in a therapeutic setting who share their same experiences and struggles. Thus, the author proposes development of a group approach to career counseling with veterans.

Career groups have been implemented effectively in many college and community settings across the nation, but VA treatment centers have yet to fully embrace them. Specifically, the group proposed here applies the principles of the cognitive information processing theory, which targets thinking styles and decision-making patterns that are currently ineffective or unhelpful for individuals as they search for occupations and career fields. Through education regarding

resources; participants' own skills, abilities and interests; and current perceived barriers to making effective career decisions, this group aims to improve the career exploration process and create positive outcomes. Over the course of six group sessions and an individual pregroup meeting between each participant and the leader, this group employs homework assignments, in-group processing of information, and presentation of assessment results to improve knowledge about the self, resources and options, and how to use

this information to make informed career decisions. A critical goal of this outlined group is fostering positive thinking and confidence in career planning, which aims to improve the overall career status of veterans with visual impairments.

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