



NATIONAL COALITION *for* HOMELESS VETERANS

“Social Work and Veterans in Rural Communities: Perceptions of Stigma as a Barrier to Accessing Mental Health Care”

Stotzer, R.L.; Whealin, J.M.; Darden, D. / [Full Report](#)

Quick Takeaways:

- Mental health stigma (both internal and external) has deterred many veterans from receiving any mental health care
- Social workers are key to teaching communities and veterans about mental health issues to reduce the stigma associated with receiving assistance

Overview:

The authors of this article focus on the stigma not only with returning veterans, but the rural communities they are going back to. According to the authors, the purpose of this paper is to:

- “1) Review existing research on mental health stigma
- 2) Outline the significant challenges that rural veterans face compared to urban counterparts
- 3) Offer suggestions for social workers working in rural areas to facilitate rural veterans finding and receiving the benefits and treatments they earned following their service to their country”

Rural Communities and Military Stigma on Mental Health:

Research suggests that many people from rural areas form “stigmas” against mental health conditions and treatment. The authors state that those in small communities are reticent to receive treatment due to the fear of being ostracized by their community. Despite geographical separation, many small communities have tight social networks where information about others is spread and personal information is discussed. Stereotypes of mental illness and the perception that those with a mental illness are weak, broken or violent intensify the stigmas.

The paper states that the military focuses on many traditional aspects “consistent with the masculine gender role identity.” Some of these attitudes include: valuing independence, self-reliance, competition, power, strength and emotional control. The same mental health stigmas faced by non-veteran communities are present in veteran communities as well. External factors differ by those in the military having fear they are being judged by the unit’s confidence in them, not receiving respect from their leaders, and the belief they would be seen as weak.

Social Workers Role:

Despite the Veterans Administration’s attempt to bring new health resources to their rural veterans, veterans are still resisting many mental health interventions. This paper suggests that the social worker is key to educating veterans and communities about mental health illnesses and treatments. The authors explain that social workers are able to build strong networks in their communities and are able to connect veterans with appropriate services and interventions.

Source: Rebecca L., Julia M. Whealin, and Dawna Darden. "Social Work with Veterans in Rural Communities: Perceptions of Stigma as a Barrier to Accessing Mental Health Care." *Advances in Social Work*. 13.1. (2012): 1-16. Web. 24 June 2014. <<http://journals.iupui.edu/index.php/advancesinsocialwork/article/view/1891/1951>>.