Effects of Adventure Therapy versus Support Groups on Emotional Stability for Veterans with PTSD Transitioning into Civilian Life

Samantha Routzahn

Longwood University

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**PICO:**
Veterans with PTSD transitioning to civilian life who participate in up to one week of adventure therapy versus support groups improves emotional stability throughout the community reintegration process.

**The Gap:**
- Within the military culture there is a stigma associated with utilizing mental health services (Scheinfeld & Spangler, n.d.).
- Veterans also lack trust in the mental health system, and many veterans fail to finish their treatment (Gelkopf, Hasson-Ohyon, Bikman, & Kravetz, 2012).
- The prevalence of mental health disorders combined with a lack of treatment seeking among veterans, often leads to a stressful reintegration process (Scheinfeld & Spangler, n.d.).
- Veterans have a need for adrenalin inducing activities as a physical and psychological outlet, and a desire to stay physically fit and challenged (Scheinfeld, Rochlen, & Russell, 2017).

**Knowledge Synthesis:**
- Adventure therapy, is a therapeutic initiative that combines outdoor adventure activities (e.g., hiking, canoeing, etc.) with facilitated therapeutic group process sessions that engages participants cognitively, affectively, and behaviorally (Scheinfeld & Spangler, n.d.).
- PTSD is a mental health condition that veterans may experience after service. Symptoms can last for an extended period and may include flashbacks, severe anxiety, and uncontrollable thoughts about the event (Mayo Clinic, 2018).
- There are many traditional treatments offered for veterans such as support groups, cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), exposure therapy (ET), and prescription medication.
- There is more research to be done, but data suggests that adventure therapy has positive impacts on veteran's well-being and psychological health, which may lead to a healthier community integration process (Duvall, & Kaplan, 2018).
- These outcomes could partly be attributed to this interventions ability to meet veterans needs for adrenalin seeking interventions that provide a physical and psychological outlet, in a familiar environment (Scheinfeld, Rochlen, & Russell, 2017).

**Knowledge Translation Plan:**
- Determine clients needs and barriers through a pre assessment (this study looked at veteran with PTSD).
- Select 1-3 Adventure therapy activities to implement, depending on the client and length of treatment time allotted.
- The CTRS will teach the skills needed for the selected activities, and implement team bonding activities to build group trust.
- Then the CTRS will implement the adventure activities in an outdoor setting.
- Allow the clients time to reflect and discuss their experiences after every activity.
- Take narrative notes throughout the session to track clients progress.
- End with a debrief session before implementing a post assessment.
- The CTRS should see improvements in areas such as social functioning, and over all well being.
- The CTRS should also see a decrease in mental health symptomology, and emotional suppression.

**Results:**
- From the expert interview
  - Adventure therapy needs an element of perceived vs. real risk factors
  - Getting people out of their comfort zone encourages growth.
  - Be sure to provide a supportive environment for the clients, build a client report, and empower them through challenge by choice.
  - The longer a client can attended an AT intervention the better.
  - Veterans have a need for thrill seeking and adventure therapy provides them that healthy leisure outlet. While helping them build a support system with other veterans, and learn coping skills through adventure activities.

**Limitations:**
- The researcher did not observe or perform adventure therapy first hand.
- There was only one expert interview conducted.
- The sample sizes, and the length of the interventions varied between the studies.
- Varying assessment tools used, and implemented at different times.

**Recommendations:**
- Perform or observe the intervention first hand.
- Perform multiple expert interviews.
- More research needs to be done with larger sample sizes, over a longer period time.
- Use the same assessment tools.