Community College Students: Veterans and Non-Veterans

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Although this study found that community college students have rates of mental health disorders, suicidal ideation, and suicidal intent similar to those of four-year schools, differences in the treatment received by students indicates that students at community colleges may have unmet mental health needs. The study that identified these differences also found higher rates of depression, PTSD, and suicidal ideation among veterans who attend community college than among the general population of veterans.

The study revealed that 20 percent of community college students screened positive for depression, 18 percent for anxiety, 9 percent for self-injury, 11 percent for suicidal ideation, and 8 percent for suicide intent (serious thoughts about attempting). Although these are similar to rates among students in four-year schools, significantly more community college students are taking psychotropic medications, and significantly fewer are receiving psychotherapy, than students at four year schools. The authors suggest that this may be because most community colleges lack the onsite mental health services available at many four-year schools. They recommended that community colleges create programs to detect mental disorders and link students with off-campus mental health services.

Community college students who were veterans were significantly more likely than their non-veteran peers to screen positive for depression and suicidal ideation (after adjusting for age, sex, and race) and higher (but not significantly higher) rates of PTSD, anxiety, self-injury, and suicide intent. Thirty-three percent of community college student veterans screened positive for depression, 26 percent for PTSD, and 19 percent for suicidal ideation. The authors reported that this was “substantially higher” than for the general population of veterans and suggested that this was a consequence of the high deployment rate among community college veterans (75 percent), the difficulty of integrating into community colleges, and the stress of working part-time while attending school.

After adjusting for age, sex, and race, student veterans were more than twice as likely to be in psychotherapy as nonveteran students. The authors reported that this probably is a consequence of their ability to access mental health care through the Department of Veterans Affairs, as they found that seventy percent of the student veterans who receive psychotherapy do so at VA clinics.
