Abstract

Objective: To examine the association between PTSD and MI and the extrinsic factors (degree of negative patterns of healthy behaviors, negative experiences in an academic setting, and lack of degree of social support) mediated by the intrinsic factors (perception of academic experience) to predict academic success objectively and subjectively.

Background: Student veterans, unlike traditional students, face challenges in transitioning to the academic environment. Having underlying mental and psychological complications of PTSD and Moral Injury (MI), leaving them feeling disconnected, not fitting in, a lack of sense of belonging, and a lack of support, hindering academic success. The existing literature was unclear and inadequate in assessing student veterans’ transitioning experience and have not evaluated academic outcome.

Methods: This study surveyed 68 college student veterans from two metro-east universities during a five-month period. The application of a partial correlation network (graphical LASSO) regression method was used to evaluate variables of PTSD, MI, health habits, college experience, social support, perception of academic experience, and academic success.

Findings: PTSD had a strong positive direct effect on MI; Both PTSD and MI had a direct negative effect on academic success; MI showed a negative direct effect on social connectedness. College experience had a direct effect on academic success and a direct negative effect on being a veteran status, as well as a negative effect on social connectedness. Social connectedness had a strong direct effect on self-efficacy. Health habits showed a weak positive effect on peer sense of belonging, self-efficacy, social connectedness, and number of children. Social support moderated between PTSD and academic success.

Conclusion: PTSD symptomatology increases negative health behaviors and decreases with social support. Both PTSD and MI combined decrease with perceived academic success and social connectedness. Social support moderated the perception of academic experience by means of social connectedness.

Implications: These results can expand the body of knowledge to help support student veterans to succeed in the academic environment, provide a social connection and sense of belonging, and help promote academic success.