

Mental Health Crisis and its Impacts on Veterans

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The reason as to why medicine is revered as one of the most important and influential fields in today's world is because adequate healthcare increases the global production of goods leading to a more engaged population. This viewpoint can be seen as insensitive due to the perceived disregard for the non-materialistic aspects of life, but in most cases, good psychological health is the key to a more efficient workforce. To understand the importance of mental well-being in the realm of productivity and resilience, aspects of brain chemistry and environmental factors must be more accommodated in the workplace. It is also imperative to establish a greater universal understanding as to how substantial of a role mental health has in almost every facet of the world. Solving the current mental health crisis requires the general public to procure a cognizance of not only feelings and emotions, but more importantly the underlying scientific reasons as to why people experience these mental detriments with the acknowledgement that it is not due to any sort of sensitivity or delicacy. Especially prominent due to the recent COVID-19 pandemic, issues such as health and economic anxiety, social barriers, and attention deficits have been at an all-time high and although recent media exposure has led to new worker policies and increased recognition of mental health in the workplace, the world still has a long way to go until universal acceptance and understanding can be reached, thus hindering productivity in the meantime.

A substantial 18 million Americans 18 or older are considered veterans of the United States Armed Forces (6-7 percent) with an additional 4 million Americans being on active duty. While this statistic does not appear to be incredibly significant, this group of people comprises a large section of the workforce, namely in positions of business and finance. However, out of this population, a shocking 10% of men and 20% of women reported receiving a PTSD diagnosis as of the year 2021, with an even greater percentage of veterans experiencing issues such as depression and suicidal ideation. Though these diagnoses are relatively common among the general population, veterans often demonstrate symptoms of PTSD as a result of a traumatic brain injury (TBI) which often results in lifelong impairments and needs. The sequelae of a traumatic brain injury often include the previously stated mental disorders, but treatments solely to the effect of the mental disorders are not proven to be particularly beneficial due to the underlying issues of injured nerve fibers and inflammation within the brain, often contributing to additional problems including a compromised attention span and difficulties completing tasks. This is an issue entirely separate from the standard diagnostic criteria of the previously stated mental disorders, however veterans with traumatic brain injuries are often mistaken as any other standard patient experiencing these issues, thus rendering them as "delicate" or unresponsive to treatment. TBI sequelae and the harmful misconceptions of veteran mental health contribute to

an alarmingly high percentage of veteran suicide rates, being 20% of the American population. This statistic can be viewed as shocking, but with the universal misunderstanding of traumatic brain injuries and the services these patients require makes this number hardly a surprise. Traumatic brain injury patients were once looked upon as lost causes, but a novel treatment recently explored by some of the most desperate veterans has given medical professionals a glimmer of hope in terms of reintroducing these patients back into society and the workforce.

Ibogaine, a compound existing in the roots of an African shrub species known as iboga, is associated with a partial loss of consciousness for the original purpose of worship and connecting with religious deities. This compound was used for religious ceremonies in Africa before being illegally introduced into the United States for hallucinogenic and therapeutic usage. Because it is such a novel treatment with potentially toxic side effects, it is not currently legal in the United States but is still being explored by veterans seeking relief from this misunderstood issue. Ibogaine has been rendered as harmful due to its enhancing effects in tandem with other drugs, but on its own can provide effects of self-evaluation which often leads to veterans with TBI-induced PTSD being able to see the larger scope of their diagnosis. Because of the inflammatory effects of traumatic brain injuries often leading to compromised signal transmission, standard treatments for PTSD and other trademark veteran mental injuries are not impactful compared to the reflective outcomes provided by ibogaine. Despite brain injuries being associated with neuron injury, ibogaine increases the transcription of neuropathic (neuron-stimulating) proteins allowing for improved function of the brain. Because ibogaine is distinguished as being highly addictive with no usage protocol, it has been classified as a psychedelic drug with no legal medical use in the United States. However, its effective tendencies and lack of medical evidence on its harmful cardiovascular side effects give lots of hope to potential studies on the drug and its possible introduction into treatment settings.

Although traumatic brain injury patients are viewed by most as high maintenance and not worth the extensive studies and treatments that will be required in order to reinstate their stability, it is imperative that the United States reaffirm the importance of stable workers and a productive workforce especially after the detriments faced due to the recent COVID-19 pandemic. Advocating for veterans who are no longer able to advocate for themselves due to sequelae of traumatic brain injuries is a substantial undertaking due to the controversy surrounding potential treatments such as ibogaine, but their potential contributions to the workforce and the nation's productivity would help to solve the employee crisis that has appeared due to poor worker treatment and the absence of occupations due to the pandemic. Every person is deserving of adequate treatment and their needs being met, especially those holding honorable positions in society with potential contributions to the workforce.

References:

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