

## Teachers with Military-Related Trauma: Exploring Their Experience and Resilience

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### ABSTRACT

Veterans transitioning into education roles often face significant challenges related to combat trauma, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This qualitative study explores the impact of military service on veterans who have transitioned into educators and identifies potential support systems. Findings reveal veterans' difficulties in the education system, particularly in accessing administrative support and navigating classrooms. The study emphasizes the importance of mental health training and awareness within school districts to support teachers with military backgrounds better, especially those with invisible conditions like PTSD, enhancing inclusive and supportive environments for veteran educators and acknowledging their unique perspectives and resilience. By revealing the need to promote administrative understanding and mental health training, the study seeks to improve the well-being and performance of veteran educators to create a more supportive education system for military veterans, reducing stigma, raising awareness, and enhancing support mechanisms.

**Keywords:** Military Trauma, Veterans, Trauma, Military Veteran Teachers

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In the United States, military veterans who have experienced trauma during service are increasingly becoming educators, a trend which has led to an increased focus on identifying whether veterans with military trauma can be successful educators (Albright et al., 2019; Cohen et al., 2019; Ford & Vignare, 2015; Gibbs et al., 2019). Although there is limited research conducted on this subject, this study and others point to several potential challenges, as well as possible benefits, which may be

associated with veterans with military trauma becoming educators (Gordon & Parham, 2019; Gregg et al., 2016; Parker et al., 2019).

Veterans of military service are more likely to have experienced difficulties associated with trauma because of exposure to a stressful event that can cause Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), a complicated and long-lasting disorder (Mobs et al., 2018; Straud et al., 2019). Williamson et al. (2020) explained that when veterans' levels of anxiety increase, both personal and societal functioning can be disrupted. This is one of the many symptoms of PTSD, and Veterans of conflict are at an even higher risk of having PTSD (Finley, 2011). The probability of having PTSD increases with the number of deployments and quantity of conflict experienced. Long wait periods make it simpler to lose hope while living with untreated PTSD.

Recently, public schools have hired over 17,000 veterans as classroom teachers, and over the last two decades, thousands of U.S. military veterans have started teaching as a second career (Gordon & Parham, 2019). In 2020, there were over 3,000,000 teachers in the United States, and 107,000 of them were military veterans (Taylor-Desir, 2022). However, Palmer et al. (2022) reported that veterans felt they did not fit in or did not have the necessary skills to be successful in teaching. They felt isolated and overwhelmed in the classroom and had trouble establishing positive relationships with students and colleagues. To begin to understand the struggles, resiliency, and life experiences that military veterans bring to a teaching career, this study investigated the research question: How has military experience affected veterans who become teachers?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

PTSD is a psychiatric disorder that may occur in people who have experienced or witnessed a traumatic event, series of events, or set of circumstances. Even though PTSD does not discriminate, most people relate PTSD to military service, and it can occur in many different circumstances (Cusack et al., 2019; Phelps & LeDoux, 2005). Veterans who have been deployed are three times more likely to experience PTSD than Veterans who have not been deployed from the same military era. Some aspects of a combat situation, such as the military occupation or specialty, the politics surrounding the conflict, the conflict's location, and the type of adversary encountered, may exacerbate PTSD and other mental health problems. PTSD in the armed forces can potentially be brought on by military sexual trauma (MST). This covers any sexual harassment or assault while a person is serving in the military. MST can happen during peace and war and impact anyone (Rattray et al., 2019).

It is estimated that 7-8% of the U.S. population will experience PTSD at some point in their lives (Cusack et al., 2019). According to Stroud et al. (2019), Military veterans who are experiencing these symptoms might think they are having a mental breakdown or are about to have a heart attack. As a result, traumatic stress reactions are sensible and adaptive, acting both as a means of surviving the trauma and as an effort to overcome it later. Understanding the normal traumatic stress reactions is much easier after the cause of these symptoms has been located (Aldridge et al., 2019; Phipps et al., 2020). Anxiety can be a situation-specific or generic feeling of unease. Military veterans tend to steer clear of a wide range of situations that make them

anxious, which may be crippling. Anxiety, sadness, and substance abuse are generally the PTSD issues that military veterans experience the most frequently.

PTSD can cause a persistent feeling of being on edge, alternating between fleeting flashes of horrific recollections and intervals of avoidance (Forbes et al., 2019). The traumatized person often feels unsettled or anxious due to the continual activation of this threat-detecting system. The threat detection system is so sensitive that it constantly activates even when there is no threat, making it difficult for the person to lead a happy life (Jones et al., 2019).

According to Albright et al. (2019), not every military veteran goes on to acquire PTSD, and personal vulnerability factors other than a traumatic event play a role in the onset of PTSD. Albright et al. (2019) explained that in the last few decades, studies have identified individual and environmental risk factors of PTSD due to military service and have identified young age, female gender, racial minority membership, lower socioeconomic position (SES), and lack of social support as factors that increase vulnerability to the adverse effects of trauma. Being a racial minority, poverty, and social isolation also increased vulnerability (Albright et al., 2019).

### **Preparing for Work-Life After Military Service**

Veterans must embark on a *transition* as they move from military to civilian life, which has been central for researchers, doctors, policymakers, and activists working to help veterans with the physical, emotional, and social experiences of post-9/11 service (Ryan-Gonzalez et al., 2019). There are advantages and disadvantages to describing these consequences as a *transition*. Transition provides an alternative to trauma and promotes a comprehensive view of veterans' post-military difficulties. It has been used to encourage veterans to seek help despite recalcitrant stigmas surrounding mental health concerns (Finley, 2011). However, veterans regularly observe that while the military does an effective job of training them to operate within the military, it does a poor job of reversing that training or preparing them before sending them back into civilian life (Finley, 2011).

Since 2011, over 3.6 million soldiers deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan have transitioned (Finley, 2011). Military engagements, combined with the varying duration of service commitment lengths, make it difficult to discretely identify, track, and compare affected at-risk groups during the service period and beyond. Finley's (2011) study of veterans deployed in the recent conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq (OIF/OEF) estimated the range of PTSD prevalence between 4.7% and 19.9% (Mobbs & Bonanno, 2018). Mental disorders have been shown to be the leading medical cause of discharges from the military in the United States, and having an anxiety disorder may lead to discharge (Packnett et al., 2017). Alternatively, transitioning to veteran status has been identified as a stressful period of significant change due to several factors, including social, interpersonal, and employment-related challenges, which may contribute to a greater vulnerability to mental health problems, including anxiety disorders (Mobbs & Bonanno, 2018).

On the other side of the employment equation, Haynes et al. (2022) found that employers' biases and lack of understanding led them to have misgivings about hiring

veterans, specifically ones with disabilities, PTSD, and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI). Most respondents in the study were not using recruitment or other resources specific to Veterans With Disabilities (VWDs) and had scant experience in accommodating workers with TBI. Haynes et al. (2022) found that most employers believed VWDs would benefit their organizations and would perform as well as other workers. Nevertheless, they were concerned that employing VWDs would involve more cost and more of a manager's time and were largely unsure if veterans were more likely than others to be violent in the workplace (Ramchand et al., 2015). The research shows that the most significant benefit of this type of training is assisting employers in recognizing the problem and developing methods of helping veterans live better lives (Morrisette et al., 2021).

### **Military Service and Teaching**

Teachers' mental health is closely linked to how effective they feel in the classroom. Finley (2011) showed that more than one-third of teachers met the threshold for mental health concerns. Thirty five percent of all teachers showed signs of depression, 36% showed signs of anxiety, 19% showed signs of PTSD, and 26% of black teachers showed signs of depression (Lewis et al., 2020). Moreover, 26% of teachers showed signs of anxiety, and 14% of Black teachers showed signs of PTSD. This relates to the fact that up to 20% of military veterans will experience PTSD symptoms, showing that teaching can be an incredibly stressful career (Finley, 2011; NCES, 2017).

While these numbers are cause for concern, teachers who are military veterans have additional mental health considerations. The education field presents many unique challenges for veterans with PTSD. For example, teachers must often work in environments with large numbers of people and loud noises, which can be difficult for those with PTSD. Teachers often must work with unpredictable situations and may face confrontation or aggression from students or parents, which can be triggering for those with PTSD (Gibbs et al., 2019). Finally, educators may have to take on roles that require them to oversee a situation and make decisions quickly, which can be difficult for those with PTSD. Likewise, Albright et al. (2019) examined the long and winding road to postsecondary education for U.S. veterans with invisible injuries. Invisible injuries, such as PTSD, TBI, and MST, can interfere with veterans' ability to access and succeed in postsecondary education (Albright et al., 2019).

Despite the high prevalence of these injuries among veterans, the current literature on postsecondary education for veterans is limited. The available research does show that veterans with military trauma can be successful educators if they have the proper support. Montgomery et al. (2020) found that with the proper support, veterans can learn to manage their trauma and be successful in the classroom. Some ways to support veteran educators include counseling and peer support, helping them build meaningful relationships with their students and colleagues, and teaching them strategies for managing their trauma (Montgomery et al., 2020). A survey by Gregg et al. (2016) found that veterans with military trauma reported feeling more confident in their teaching abilities and having a greater sense of purpose in their new role as educators. The survey found that veterans with military trauma felt better equipped

to handle difficult classroom situations and reported being better able to connect with their students (Williamson et al., 2020).

Veterans with military trauma reported feeling more connected to their students, which can lead to greater academic success. Other studies have been conducted that have looked at the potential benefits of veterans with military trauma becoming educators (Gregg et al., 2016). Griffin and Gilbert (2015) found that veterans with military trauma can bring a unique perspective to the classroom and that their experiences can be beneficial to both their students and the wider school community. The authors found that veterans with military trauma can provide a unique perspective on leadership, which can be beneficial to both the students and the school community. Veterans with military trauma can learn to manage trauma with support, including access to counseling and peer support, building meaningful relationships with their students and colleagues, and engaging in activities that help them process and manage their trauma (Rattray et al., 2020).

### **Non-Investment in Training on PTSD in Schools**

American organizations, including school districts, have increasingly invested in training programs to address societal challenges (McIntyre et al., 2020). Many of these programs focus on bullying, harassment, and discrimination (Cook et al., 2019). However, comprehensive training that fosters awareness and understanding of mental health remains limited. Only 17 states have enacted laws requiring mental health training and resources for school staff (Gould & Honsberger, 2022). While some programs, such as Mental Health First Aid, provide valuable guidance, most school districts lack structured initiatives that equip educators with the skills to recognize, support, and create inclusive environments for individuals navigating mental health conditions (Blakey et al., 2022). Expanding compliance training related to ADA/504 and integrating mental health awareness programs can empower educators to foster wellness in both students and colleagues, ensuring that schools are spaces where mental well-being is recognized as essential to learning and professional success (Morrisette et al., 2021).

For instance, while Texas has the second largest veteran population of 1.5 million veterans, the Statewide Behavioral Health Coordinating Council's behavior health expenditure report for 2022 showed the Texas Education Agency (TEA) did not receive any portion of the \$1.7 billion in general revenue distributed by the legislature across 24 of the other states entities for mental health or substance abuse prevention, intervention, and treatment services (Saxton, 2022) The cost of any mental health activity undertaken by TEA or school districts had to be absorbed into their general budget or funded with outside grants that are time-limited and will expire (Gregg et al., 2016; Saxton, 2022).

## **METHOD**

This study was conducted following a design to explore the effects of teacher training, development, and identity of military veterans who are teachers. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from teachers with military experience (Simola,

2019). The framework of this design enabled the researchers to gather the participants' perspectives (Aspers & Corte, 2019).

### **Positionality**

Jason is a white male veteran, educator, and researcher. That positionality influenced all aspects of this project and the desire to provide veterans entering the field of education the ability to express their lived experiences. He is an advocate for policy change and explores the challenges, barriers, and implications faced by veterans' transition into civilian life. Michael is a white male teacher educator and researcher dedicated to building solidarity with students and communities, serving veterans/students, and equipping them to be life-changing teachers (Boucher, 2020).

### **Sampling**

Beginning in July 2023, Jason met with veterans within the VFW and reached out to educators within the surrounding school districts and church group affiliations. Before the interviews, no screening was done to determine if the participants had endured military-related trauma. The research sample consisted of participants who had previously worked as educators and self-identified as military veterans. All participants were provided with a pseudonym for this study. There were three participants in this study. While we acknowledge that this is not a large sample, these veterans exemplify the struggles identified in the literature, and their accounts align with the other research. The first participant, Janet, was a 42-year-old white female and a 10-year Air Force veteran. She experienced combat duty overseas, taught in various locations stateside, and was formerly a Texas teacher. Andrew was a 48-year-old Hispanic male and a 5-year Army veteran. He did not serve in combat. At the time of the interview, he was employed as a teacher in Texas. The third respondent, Sam, was a white male and a 10-year Army veteran. He completed two overseas tours and taught in Georgia.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection used semi-structured interview questions that offered insights about how participants felt their school setting affected their success or understanding of their military background (Aspers & Corte, 2019). The interviews revealed if their schools promoted access to mental health training and, if not, the potential benefits of such education.

The seven questions and follow-up covered background in the military, personal and civilian education, and experience with teaching. The interviews focused on military experience, deployments, and other situations that may have exposed the participant to trauma. Participants then identified how they felt when they engaged in teaching roles without proper training or sensitization on mental health identification from their experiences and ways that the system has or has not been supportive (Aspers & Corte, 2019). As interviews progressed, the responses from participants began to repeat similar experiences and challenges without introducing new

perspectives or information and reached a saturation point. For example, multiple veterans expressed feeling unsupported by the school administration and isolated due to their PTSD, highlighting a consistent narrative across the responses. Following Strom et al. (2012) as a guide, there began to be clear indications that the participant had told their stories, and the interviews were ended so that participants would not experience anxiety or relive traumas.

### **Analysis Procedures**

The analysis used emergent design, and all interviews were transcribed and coded to identify emergent themes. The data was analyzed through the lenses of proper reference standards of descriptive vividness, methodological congruence, analytic preciseness, theoretical connectedness, and heuristic relevance (Strom et al., 2012).

The data obtained from interviews and documents underwent thematic analysis, which included identifying and categorizing reoccurring themes and patterns in the material (Lochmiller, 2021). Throughout the analysis, the data obtained from the interviews underwent coding and organization, which were classified into significant categories derived from reoccurring themes (Roberts, et al., 2019). The coding identified correlations between the wartime experiences of veterans and their subsequent careers as educators. Based on the responses from the interviews, the five primary themes that emerged were: 1) the lack of administrative assistance, 2) misalignment with teacher expectations, 3) the challenges in integration and acceptance, 4) a military background is an asset, and 5) the need to address mental health and veterans' needs.

Most importantly, the interviews reveal the potential benefits and challenges military veterans face when transitioning to teaching educators (Gregg et al., 2016). This analysis provides valuable qualitative data that contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the experiences and perspectives of veterans-turned-educators.

## **FINDINGS**

### **Lack of Administrative Assistance**

Janet offered comprehensive and insightful responses addressing the core interview inquiries. Initially, in her career as an educator, she felt confident she could speak freely to the administration concerning her needs or requirements. However, she felt she was becoming a nuisance to the administration over time. She explained, “When I first started teaching, yes. As time went on, no. When asking for accommodation due to certain stressors, I have, it was my perception that I was becoming a nuisance to them.” Consequently, the constant lack of support from the school administration hindered her ability to effectively navigate the difficulties faced due to military-related trauma and unforgettable experiences.

Sam identified the need for strong administrative support. He discussed the constant challenge of administrative insensitivity to educators' needs and noted considerable challenges in the teaching profession, notably with administration.

When asked if he was free to ask for anything he needed from the administration, he said, “No, not at all.” Andrew also stated that he had the administration’s assistance but did not have the financial support to accomplish his goals.

### **Misalignment with Teaching Expectations**

Participants expressed a significant dissonance between their expectations of teaching and the reality they encountered. Motivated by a desire to effect positive change and mentor future generations, a sense of isolation marred their actual experiences due to PTSD and lack of support from colleagues and administration. The disconnect between aspirations and reality made them question the value of their military service and their capacity to bring about meaningful change within the education system.

Janet became a teacher driven by a desire to facilitate change, positively impact communities, and mentor future generations. She said, “I wanted to be a facilitator of change. I wanted to be a mentor to our future.” Most importantly, Janet idealized the teaching vision inspired by TV shows and movies watched during military service. However, her actual experience differed considerably from her expectations. Instead of receiving unwavering support and collaboration from administrations, she felt like an outcast during her struggle with PTSD, without any form of support from administration or colleagues. Janet hoped that as a teacher, her students would recognize her as a significant figure in their lives.

Andrew, who did not serve in combat but had prior military experience, was a Texas teacher with ten years of experience. When asked why he became an educator, he responded, “I think for a while, I guess, just trying to find a purpose as far as during and after my military career.” Andrew spoke about his work with children from broken families and his aim to be a good role model and support system. He expressed a desire to work in physical therapy and assist disabled soldiers in the future. All three participants expressed a tremendous desire to be there for their children and offer the support they may have lost as children owing to various situations from their military time.

When Sam was questioned about his professional aspirations as a teacher, he highlighted the necessity of making a difference in the lives of at least one person. He said, “I would say, hey, go with God. Change the world and make a difference.” Sam offered personal stories of past students approaching him, expressing thanks and confirming his efforts were worthwhile. As a teacher, Sam’s responses consider the expectations versus the realities. He elaborated on how his educational background had thoroughly equipped him, fostering an analytical mindset. This positive attitude, honed through rigorous academic training, underscored his readiness to navigate and address the complex challenges encountered in his professional environment. Both teachers emphasized the necessity of being adaptive and inventive to provide their students with a better learning environment, especially when resources are limited.

In contrast to their military experience, where participants sometimes questioned the purpose and impact of their actions, they aspired to make a meaningful and positive difference in their new roles. However, a lack of administrative oversight and assistance hampered their capacity to attain their objectives. Janet expressed shock



and sadness, stating, "I never thought that administration would be so disconnected from what educators do that it pushes the good ones out." This made participants doubt the worth of their military service and their capacity to affect change in the school system.

Participants' expectations of educators' training did not match reality. Their military experience and no-nonsense approach contrasted with colleagues' less strict and organized attitudes and opinions. Due to a lack of understanding and compassion for their unique experiences and perspectives, participants struggled to integrate into the teaching community.

### **Challenges in Integration and Acceptance**

Participants' military experience made it more difficult for them to integrate into the school environment. Their military-style approach was more straightforward and controlling than that of their peers. As a result, they needed help integrating into the classroom setting and sharing their unique experiences and viewpoints. This topic emphasized the need for increased school-wide knowledge and assistance.

Sam pointed out that the administration's insensitivity to veterans and people with PTSD made work difficult. During encounters, Sam felt misunderstood and harshly evaluated. Male instructors, particularly those with military experience, were typically given complex tasks reflecting a notion of hardship and obedience without complaint. Colleagues and supervisors misunderstood Sam as a male instructor with PTSD and a military history. Sam noted that the education system is primarily dominated by females, which might contribute to unconscious prejudices and preconceptions in their working connections. When asked about these challenges, Sam said,

It's a couple of things. Right now, being an elementary school teacher, it's a very female-oriented world. Many schools are lucky if they have two males teaching, and you're talking pre-K here to fifth grade, and there's 30-something elementary schools and multiple classes of each on each level, so administration is already used to not dealing with a man. The staff is not used to being able to deal with a man. The kids are the ones that are the easiest. They come in terrified, like, 'I've never had a male teacher before.'

Sam's experience underscores the cultural adjustment required when transitioning from the military to teaching. The lack of male colleagues limited Sam's opportunities for camaraderie and mutual understanding, making his integration into the school community more challenging. The predominantly female environment in schools exacerbated feelings of isolation and the struggle to fit in, which are already common issues for veterans adjusting to civilian life. Moreover, the educational environment's emphasis on nurturing and emotional intelligence conflicted with the military's values of toughness and stoicism. This disparity can make it difficult for male veterans to adapt their communication and interaction styles to fit the expectations of their new roles as educators.

During academic training, Sam encountered mixed messages about the support available for veterans. While feedback from others varied, Sam was able to navigate and adapt to the system's constraints. However, in real teaching settings, participants consistently reported feeling let down by their administrations. Rather than receiving clear guidance on available accommodations under legal frameworks such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, they often faced uncertainty and inconsistent responses. This lack of structured support contributed to feelings of isolation and exclusion, particularly for those managing service-related trauma or diagnosed PTSD, which may qualify as a disability under ADA protections (Dieterich et al., 2017). It is important to recognize that formal accommodations involve a legal process rather than individual instructor discretion. Beyond compliance, fostering a trauma-informed and supportive teaching environment remains essential in ensuring that veterans and others with mental health needs can thrive in educational settings.

Andrew cited the influence of a helpful administration favorably. Open lines of communication and prompt attention to student needs brightened the classroom atmosphere. Andrew was grateful for the help from his school administration. He said that whenever he communicated his needs or suggestions, the administration was responsive and helpful in coming up with answers.

### **Military Background is An Asset**

All three veterans spoke highly of the work ethic, flexibility, and capacity to handle pressure honed during service. This military experience helped them overcome obstacles in the classroom, proving that their backgrounds were an asset in the teaching profession. Andrew, a combat-free Army veteran of five years, showed how his service had given him a strong work ethic and the capacity to adapt to new situations. He reported that his time in the military ingrained in him a methodical attitude to work that allowed him to face obstacles head-on and work hard to achieve his goals. He explained that his work ethic was so strict that it seamlessly carried over into his teaching profession. Andrew reported that his flexibility, acquired in the military, enabled him to adjust to the dynamic nature of higher education and develop novel approaches to challenges. When asked if the education met his expectations of what he envisioned, Andrew said,

Yeah. I was fortunate to have great teachers at [a regional university in Texas]. And they somewhat prepared me—well actually, not somewhat. They prepared me well in a sense. [For example], we had to create our own curriculum map in one of the assignments. And of course, I went to a private Catholic school where obviously the state doesn't give you money. So, I didn't have much. But because of this curriculum map that I created myself, I was able to 'Okay, I can do this. I can manipulate. I can move this, move this around.' So, my expectations when I got to the school were already to a point where 'Okay, this is what I was expecting.'

Sam's interview sheds light on the impact of educators' military experience and the significant obstacles that arise in their new careers. Most importantly, Sam was inspired to become an educator by family members who worked in the military and served as teachers afterward, with a desire to help young children and make a difference in society. He said,

It's something that started back when I was young. My grandfather was in the military, and he was a teacher, and that kind of inspired me right there. And then my other grandfather was also in the military, so that kind of went that military route, but then coming into the military saw a lot of young kids coming in with this chip on their shoulder, and I was older coming active duty because I did six years of reserve beforehand.

Sam stressed authenticity in teaching and student relationships as the greatest motivation and that he learned how to deal with stress, thanks mainly to his time in the military. He discussed how he developed the capacity to keep his cool under pressure because of his stressful experiences while serving in the military. This quality served him well in the classroom, allowing him to alleviate the stress of teaching and foster an atmosphere that encouraged student growth. He stated,

And I find they put me on lots of duties that nobody else will do because—for instance, traffic obviously parents they're going to yell at you, and they're going to cuss you out, and a lot of the people can't handle it. So, they're like, 'He's military, put him out there.

Both Andrew and Sam stressed how their military backgrounds had a beneficial impact on how they approached teaching. They could approach problems systematically and keep their composure under pressure because of the discipline and resiliency they developed while serving in the military. They both reported that they created authority in the classroom, demanded respect from their pupils, and set an example for them using this military-inspired strategy. They explained how they could employ innovative teaching tactics and adjust to changing student demands because of their capacity to stay flexible in dynamic educational environments.

They discussed their military experience and how it informed their teaching profession. They credit their upbringing and army history for their work ethic, flexibility, and ability to deal with stress. They expressed that their military perspective has helped them navigate the difficulties of teaching while retaining a good outlook. The interview finished with Andrew expressing gratitude for the research and offering further assistance. They exhibited appreciation for the study and for conducting the research and indicated a desire to return to their old teaching environment.

### **The Need to Address Mental Health and Veterans' Needs**

All three participants in the study stressed the need to raise public awareness of and assist educators with military experience, especially those struggling with mental

health problems like PTSD. The participants' experiences highlight the significance of identifying and meeting the requirements of this group inside the educational system.

Janet emphasized the need to attend to mental health concerns. She served as an example of the need for an understanding and accommodating atmosphere due to her experience of feeling unsupported by the school administration and her difficulty communicating her concerns and needs. Her story demonstrated how a lack of sufficient support systems might make it difficult for educators with military experiences to successfully deal with the aftereffects of their service, such as PTSD. Regarding positive assistance, Janet emphasized the necessity of administrative understanding and empathy. She recommended that administrators explore how they can help her succeed and give support during stressful periods. Janet compared physical injuries to PTSD, underlining the need to recognize and support invisible ailments and mental health difficulties.

Andrew expressed his desire to assist young people who may be experiencing difficulties similar to his own. His emphasis on helping children from broken homes and his desire to encourage handicapped troops highlighted the critical role that instructors with military histories play in supporting and understanding pupils going through challenges. Andrew's story illustrated how personal experiences may help teachers create a welcoming and compassionate learning environment.

Sam shed light on the difficulties experienced by male instructors with military histories in a primarily female educational environment. The overwhelmingly female environment often contrasts with a predominantly male military environment. The educational community must be more sensitive and observant because administrators and coworkers misunderstood and unjustly judged him. Sam's story highlighted the need to create a network of assistance that attends to the requirements of educators with military experience, especially those who are dealing with PTSD.

The participants' experiences demonstrate the need for more assistance for instructors with military histories and mental health issues like PTSD. Sam said,

And I will deal with all the stuff admin or whatever the discrimination, especially with PTSD, because they just don't get it. Even during field day, when things pop off, they'll jump in, and the bell goes off, and I'm jumping.

The participants' responses identify the difficulties veterans-turned-educators experience and the lack of support they meet inside the educational system. The participants' experiences are consistent with the overall focus and intent of the study, which suggests the need for enhanced awareness and assistance for veterans in teaching positions. These findings contribute to a better understanding of how military service affects educators' professional careers and the potential advantages of mental health training and sensitization in school districts and other contexts.

## **DISCUSSION**

There is a significant relationship between military trauma and classroom educator success, particularly in veterans' transition into teaching educator roles (Gregg et al.,

2016). The findings from this study extend the current literature by identifying the significant challenges veterans face in educator roles, specifically those related to PTSD experiences (Lewis et al., 2020). These challenges include feelings of isolation and a lack of support from fellow educators and the administration, which starkly contrast veterans' expectations before transitioning to teaching. Another significant issue is the insensitivity of the education system, including supervisors, toward educators with military experience and PTSD. School administrations often fail to understand veterans' unique backgrounds adequately and instead assign them complex roles that can exacerbate stress and trigger traumatic responses.

Male educators suffer significant challenges navigating the education system because of the increased stereotypes and prejudice of the system being female-oriented. Notably, these challenges, which show their struggles to navigate the education system to find a purpose for doing the greater good, reflect the barriers well documented in the literature. On the other hand, the veterans reveal their sense of motivation, finding a purposeful meaning, and the desire to have a positive impact as an educator with military experience. These insights resonate with the benefits highlighted in the literature, particularly the unique qualities that veterans might bring to the field of education. Some of these benefits include using unique skills from the military employed in the classroom, being a role model to students, knowing and having a unique ability to build community and teamwork among students, having cultural awareness, enhanced adaptability, and understanding of organization and ethical decision-making (Opalinski, 2023).

## **Recommendations**

The following recommendations are based on the review of literature and findings:

### **Enhancing Mental Health Support for Educators**

While a complete legal analysis of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is beyond the scope of this article, it is important to recognize that legal protections exist for employees with disabilities, including PTSD. However, beyond compliance, employers should actively implement mental health training and resources to support school workers, particularly veterans transitioning into teaching. Research indicates that many military veterans continue to face challenges integrating into the profession due to past traumatic experiences. Training programs should be designed to address concerns related to PTSD, anxiety, and depression, equipping educators with the knowledge and skills needed to manage their own mental health while also fostering supportive environments for their students (Riedy et al., 2016).

### **Targeted Assistance for Veterans in Transition**

It may be difficult for veterans to transition from military duty to civilian life, particularly if they have invisible wounds like PTSD, traumatic brain injury (TBI), or military sexual trauma (MST) (Mobbs & Bonanno, 2018). Specialized transition

programs should be created to meet their specific requirements and aid their effective absorption into civilian life.

### **Increasing Employer Awareness and Support for Disabled Veterans**

To create a more diverse workforce, educating companies on the advantages of employing veterans with disabilities, including PTSD, will bring veterans' skills and experiences to new areas of the economy (Albright et al., 2019).

### **Combating Veterans' PTSD Symptoms**

Results show that more veterans seeking mental health care may be influenced by promoting group psychotherapy as a viable PTSD treatment. Veterans may share their stories and feelings in a safe setting during group therapy, which promotes healing and personal development.

### **Encourage Involvement and Support from the Community**

Enhancing social support and lowering feelings of loneliness among veterans requires cultivating a sense of community, which is important for this recommendation. Encouraging the formation of support networks and organizations may provide veterans with a forum to discuss their experiences and find sympathy with others who have dealt with comparable difficulties.

### **Increasing Research, Education, and Awareness of PTSD**

Understanding veterans' unique difficulties with invisible wounds, such as PTSD, throughout postsecondary education and occupational transitions calls for more research (Cusack et al., 2019). Data shows that developing more efficient support systems may be aided by collecting thorough data on the incidence and effects of PTSD among veterans.

The school system may better assist veterans transitioning from military duty to teaching positions by acknowledging the potential advantages they can offer to the classroom, such as resilience, leadership skills, and distinctive viewpoints. Research implications go beyond the field of education. The results highlight how important it is to respect the mental health issues veterans experience in various professional contexts, including corporate settings and offer tangible support to help veterans thrive in the workplace. Veterans may be better prepared to thrive in their chosen jobs by encouraging businesses and organizations to support mental health awareness and sensitivity training. This research advances knowledge of how military experience affects veterans who become educators. It emphasizes how crucial it is to provide sufficient assistance, including mental health services, administrative awareness, and a flexible work environment. These suggestions may help organizations and school districts create a more welcoming environment for veterans, promoting their success and well-being in their personal and professional lives. This study also shows that efforts to lessen stigma, raise consciousness, and

enhance the support system for veterans can aid veterans in succeeding as teachers and making valuable contributions to society.

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