

Book Review

Handbook of Psychosocial Interventions for Veterans and Service Members: A Guide for the Non-Military Mental Health Clinician

Nathan D. Ainspan, Craig J. Bryan, Walter Erich Penk

ISBN:9780199353996

Oxford University Press, 2016

The challenges faced by service members, military veterans and their families are often not well recognised or understood by non-military clinicians. This is the first comprehensive handbook to draw on expertise from the Department of Defense, the Department of Veterans Affairs, veteran service organisations as well as leading academics in addressing the unique issues faced by the military. While discussion is largely based on the U.S. Armed Forces, the key sections of this handbook are often applicable to the worldwide military context.

It introduces the reader to the complex and often devastating impact that war and deployment can have on the mental health and wellbeing of service members, military veterans and their families. It highlights how many service members and veterans live with unaddressed mental health and social difficulties; functioning while suffering being a pervasive state for many.

It instils hope that evidence based, psychosocial interventions can help alleviate mental distress and assist veterans in their transition in to civilian life. There is a section on the assessment and psychosocial treatment of psychiatric disorders such as PTSD, depression, anxiety and sleep disturbances. While it provides a useful summary of research examining the effectiveness of cognitive processing therapy and prolonged exposure therapy, there is no reference to EMDR or other trauma focused approaches such as narrative exposure therapy. It does, however, provide useful guidance on modifications to therapy to consider when working within the military. Importance is placed on the provision of education for non-military clinicians on military specific issues and the stressors related to readjustment and reintegration to civilian life. The authors provide an illuminating section on the demographics and characteristics of military culture. It addresses issues of diversity, such as the stressors facing national guard and military reserves, the changing role of military women, and the stigma and historical discrimination faced by gay, lesbian, and transgender service members. The unique challenges, as well as opportunities, facing military families, including parenting issues, helping children cope with injury or event death of a parent are recognised with particular reference to considerations that might be relevant to treatment with military families.

This comprehensive handbook is a valuable resource for healthcare professionals working with service members, veterans and their families. While its section on clinical practices and military administration is heavily focused on the U.S. context, its strength rests within its broader consideration of the wider social and familial factors that impact on military life. Rather than adopt an approach consistent with a traditional medical model that focuses on deficit or illness, the authors draw attention towards the facilitation of post-traumatic growth and resilience in veterans and their family members; this in itself providing the fundamental foundations for 'meaningfully' working with this diverse population.

Dr Nicola Cogan

Clinical Psychologist, Lecturer, University of Strathclyde

Nicola.Cogan@strath.ac.uk