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2nd Place Contest Entry: Treatment of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in a Veteran Population: Efficacy of Complementary and Alternative Medicine Therapies

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Essay:

Senior Thesis, the final evaluation of my undergraduate career, is composed of 50 content pages in which I critically review the literature to test my hypothesis. My thesis is composed of academic sources from various professional journals, like *Military Medicine* and the *Journal of Clinical Psychology*; governmental resources, like the National Institute of Health, US Census Bureau, and the Department of Veterans Affairs; and reference books, like the fifth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*.

My research commenced after I consulted the Library Research and Subject Guide for Psychology. The databases page directed my beginning searches to PsycARTICLES, PsycINFO, and Science Direct, which have proved themselves the most useful databases for finding articles with high relevancy to my thesis, in addition to Web of Science and Academic Search Premier of EBSCO Industries. My database searching skills were birthed during my first semester at Chapman from an instructional presentation at the library taught by Mr. Douglas R. Dechow where he demonstrated useful research strategies, such as optimizing searches through keywords and subject headings, which I later adapted into my researching style. During the full course of my time at Chapman, I have attended four of these presentations and have watched the Library Research Strategy PowerPoint on the library's website. Together, they have strengthened my ability to consolidate search results.

During my thesis research, I always narrowed my search results to only publications of peer-reviewed journals and often imposed a year limitation. Other search limits I used included selecting full text material; excluding non-article content, dissertations, and book reviews; restricting results to the specific methodology of empirical articles, and occasionally to literature reviews. Sometimes, my results would yield articles with too many confounding variables. To remedy this tedious issue, I found using the "AND" and "NOT" conjunctions were very useful. For instance, there is a lot of treatment research on PTSD-positive veterans whom also have Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), however patients with TBI are not part of my thesis population. Adjusting my search terms to not include studies with TBI patients made researching efficient because it eliminated sources not applicable to my hypothesis.

I discovered during PSY497A that the novelty of my topic and veteran-specified population made for an added challenge to finding a sufficient amount of credible articles. Thus, I decided to locate more material through print resources, four books published by the American Psychological Association to be exact. Initially, I had concerns about gaining access to them because they were new, one book was just released for 2015 and the others were from 2014. I consulted a reference desk employee for guidance and they suggested an Interlibrary Loan. Chapman's library network allowed me access to all four books quickly, despite their limited availability.

In PSY497B, I needed to expand my results and cease restricting them. I broadened the scope of listed articles in my usual databases, plus supplemental searches in the Military & Government Collection, JSTOR, and Discover, using the SmartText searching and by adjusting the search mode to look within the full text. I also employed Google Scholar, which found useful articles but many were unavailable to public users. I was able to access their full text through Discover after I searched using the Author and Title subject headers. Finally, once I had collected an adequate number of articles, I used the results tables of reviews and reference lists

of other articles to locate additional studies relevant to my hypothesis.

Having credible sources is essential to writing a strong thesis. I am not yet a professional, therefore I couldn't immediately know which sources were reliable. My thesis class taught a weighting strategy that quantifies the quality of each article's design and content to evaluate credibility and their strength of support or refutation to my hypothesis. Furthermore, identifying leaders of the field is crucial to establishing competence in a thesis, whom I found after I acquired ample enough research to observe which authors are published and cited by others most often. Government and other national resources were used to operationally define my variables when applicable. Original, source articles of PTSD diagnostic measures were located through the reference lists of other articles.

The skills I have gained from the production of my thesis will greatly aid me in conducting future research. I have learned how to critically evaluate an article's statistics and analyze their significance. I have memorized the majority of APA format rules and I am comfortable with professional thesis formatting. I have gained a critical eye towards evaluating the quality of research, noticing bias, concluding strengths and weaknesses, and determining the significance of any given research. My experience with Senior Thesis has made me feel professionally prepared, knowledgeable of my field, and confident in my ability to conduct research successfully and efficiently.

Summary and Bibliography:

Abstract

It is estimated that a half million veterans from recent deployments in the Middle East conflicts and about 479,000 veterans deployed during the Vietnam War are diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Current treatments are limited by a relatively high frequency of patients who do not continue the therapy. With increased PTSD diagnosis and limited effectiveness of treatments, there is a growing need to research and develop new therapies to better assist affected service members. The present study assessed the clinical validity of Complementary and Alternative Medicine therapies for the treatment of PTSD symptoms in a military population using a meta-analysis design. It was hypothesized that a veteran diagnosed with PTSD who is treated with Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) therapies will experience a greater improvement in their PTSD symptoms than a veteran diagnosed with PTSD who is treated with other, current evidence-based treatments (CEBT). Data were obtained from empirical articles that compared and contrasted CAM therapies against CEBT's across commonly used PTSD symptom assessment scales. Though CAM therapies were not shown to be significantly superior to other therapies, the findings did indicate that select CAM therapies have valid, clinical implications for the reduction of PTSD symptoms in a veteran population. More research is needed to assess, isolate, and standardize CAM therapies for the treatment of PTSD in different veteran populations.

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