

Military Social Work: A Methodological Overview

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Abstract

Military social work is a dedicated field of practice that provides obligatory support and intrusions to military personnel, retirees, their spouses and their dependents through private practice, active service or work with veteran services. The military social workers can entirely assist and help to resolve combat-related disturbance in military members through their services, but having an immediate experience creates a distinctive tie amid the military social worker and client. The most imperative attribute to be a military social worker is Empathy. The majority of people with whom the social workers work, are in a state of crisis and emotional distress. Consequently, one must be able to proffer a caring, understanding and empowering environment to them. Military social work is a less explored area in our country. The main aim of the paper is to deliver sound knowledge of this field. The paper intends to explain what exactly military social work is and its various forms.

Keywords: *Military social work, Challenges, Relevance, Counseling, and advocacy.*

Introduction

The concept of social work in the armed forces is often seen in the U.S. This discovered area of study, by the U.S has in turn lead in the interest and welfare of the army. Also the paper strongly focuses on the significance of military social work in Indian setting and the suicides happening in the Indian army. The paper elaborates that what could be the possible reasons for such suicides and what could a military social workers do like counseling, therapeutic sessions or even their advocacy in order to assist the distressed army men and which in turn would help in reducing these suicidal cases. Also the paper emphasize upon the challenges ahead of the military social workers in supporting the concerned army officers, veterans and ex-servicemen. Also, the paper would explore the possibility and the scope of army social work within Indian

Military settings by relating with the foreign experiences and experiments to Indian understanding and prospect. Though professional social work practice is far reaching in its scope, a changing world is continue to present new challenges, opportunities and avenues to make a difference. There are many opportunities for professional social workers. One of such opportunity is Military social work in which interested social workers serves veterans and military families. Regardless of practice area, chances are that nearly all social workers will serve this population in some capacity, whether through mental and behavioral health therapy, social services, housing, health care, care coordination, or a variety of other services. Other social workers may work primarily with service members or veterans through their private practice specifically aimed at serving them, or through veteran's service organizations or other targeted agencies. Still other social workers will choose to serve in the armed forces, including the Air Force, Army, and Navy (<https://www.socialworkers.org/Practice/Military-Veterans/Social-Work-in-the-Armed-Forces>).

Today, technology is advancing several methods of service delivery and allowing for the extension of new approaches to the traditional notions of existing relationships. The professional social work practice is distinctive from other helping professional services in its approach of assisting people to function optimally within their environments. Today's social workers have access to a far wider range of information and knowledge related to values and ethics than did earlier generations of practitioners. Times have changed radically in this respect, and the profession's literature must maintain pace. Present-day social workers must be acquainted with advancing knowledge related to the profession's values and the kind of ethical issues and the challenges that practitioners encounter (Reamer, 2013).

Practice in social work and the human services entail, supporting a wide assortment of people who necessitate help in dealing amid the problems in their lives or providing social services to populace so that they can live their lives more efficiently. Children and their families, young people, people with physical or intellectual disabilities, with psychological health, needs, and problems allied with old age, and issues faced by communities are all part the extensive hub of these services under social work practice (Hugman, 2013).

Military Social Work

Military social workers work with active military service members and veterans to help them address and manage the social, emotional, psychological, and ancestral challenges they may countenance as a result of their job. Military social workers also counsel and support the current and former service members' families. And work in a wide arrangement of settings varying from military bases and medical facilities to VA Centers. Active and ex- military personnel can face distinctive psychological and emotional challenges due to their profession, together with but not limited to segregation, nervousness, sleeplessness, post-traumatic stress disorder, and depression. They may also experience socioeconomic, domestic, and/or behavioral problems such as unemployment and financial destitution, matrimonial conflicts, isolation from social circles, and substance maltreatment. Military social workers facilitate their clients attend to these issues through a blend of individual and/or family counseling, resource steering services, edification, plus the improvement in programs and proposals designed specifically at helping military professionals and their families. Military social workers can work as entrenched social workers within active armed units, and can even serve as Active or Reserve Duty personnel in a unit. They can also work in civilian settings with military members who are off duty or veterans who are dealing with the ordeal of their past work. Characteristically, military social workers commence their career working closely with individuals and families, and as they get more experience, they can progress to headship and directorial positions, such as program managers and directors of psychological health (<https://www.onlinemswprograms.com/features/guide-to-military-social-work.html>).

Work Settings of Military Social Workers

Military social workers work in settings where current and former military personnel entail or hunt for support and counseling. Active duty and civilian military social workers are looked-for all over the world in varied capacities in every subdivision of service moreover government organization. The United States Department of Defense has developed abundant emotional and mental health support services for active and off-duty military employees, while the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) provide work for social workers countrywide to support veterans through several programs. The types of government-funded military support programs mean that

military social workers are employed in a wide and diverse range of work environments, and can take on many different roles during their career. Environments where military social workers work include but are not limited to military bases and units, medical facilities, military support centers, VA health centers, community service organizations, and even private practices. While their work setting may vary, the core mission of military social workers remains the same: to help active military service members fulfill their professional responsibilities while maintaining healthy personal lives, and/or to support veterans in transitioning to civilian life and coping with the emotional ramifications of their past experiences. “Civilian and active duty social workers all serve the same population: military members and their families, no matter where they are assigned.

While specific job titles may vary across different military divisions, government departments, and other organizations in which military social workers work, types of military social workers may be generally categorized into the following:

A. Embedded and Active Duty Military Social Workers

All branches of the U.S. Armed Forces, which includes the U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, and National Guard, provide mental and emotional health services to their active personnel. Military social workers play an important role in these services, and can be found at military bases, often within medical and mental health departments. While some of these social workers are civilians, in that they do not serve in the military, others complete training and serve alongside other military service members.

Social workers who work at military bases typically provide targeted counseling and emotional support, as well as resource connections and education, to help their clients function optimally at their job. Military social workers can serve and travel with one unit specifically, which is known as being “embedded” to a particular unit.

Due to the intense and stressful demands of their job, military service members tend to experience mental, emotional, and relationship challenges that both result from and negatively impact their work. “Typical issues include relationships, job-related stress, communication, financial stress, sleep disturbance, combat reintegration, transitioning out of the military, anger management and lack of healthy coping skills.

Military support programs, such as the Family Advocacy Program, the Navy's Substance Abuse Rehabilitation Program, and the Air Force's Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention and Treatment Program can also employ social workers and other mental and medical care professionals to provide classes and workshops on topics such as emotional regulation, conflict resolution, stress management, and substance addictions.

As military social workers gain more experience in the challenges that active personnel face and how to address them, they may be able to take on leadership roles, such as a position as Director of Psychological Health (DPH) within a given military base or division. Directors of Psychological Health and other leadership roles within military social work can involve a combination of administrative/supervisory responsibilities and clinical work with military personnel.

B. Civilian Military Social Workers

Different military branches, from the U.S. Army to the Marine Corps, have resources in place to support their personnel in civilian environments when they return from deployment. Such resources include personnel support centers specific to each military branch, community service organizations, government programs that serve all military branches, support service that connects military service members and their families to phone-based and in-person counseling and support on issues such as spousal conflict, personal health, education, and financial literacy. Civilian based support centers that serve military personnel and their families.

C. Veteran Social Workers

Another important role that military social workers can play is counseling and supporting veterans who are struggling with reintegrating into society and/or managing the mental, emotional, and familial challenges they might encounter as a result of their past experiences. The VA employs over 11,000 social workers nationwide. It is recognized as the single largest employer of social workers by the NASW.

The VA funds many different departments, facilities, and programs to address the complex and sometimes severe challenges that veterans face. Social workers are an essential part of many of these programs, and can be found at VA Medical Centers, Community Based Clinics, and Veterans Centers. The majority of social workers work in

two distinct settings primary medical care and homeless programs. Primary care social workers generally work in inpatient and outpatient medical units at VA medical centers and at community-based outpatient clinics. Homeless program social workers work in the same settings, yet focus on providing veterans with resources and referrals to VA and community programs serving the homeless (<https://www.onlinemswprograms.com/features/guide-to-military-social-work.html>).

Relevance in the Indian Military Setting

The army conducts a psychological analysis at the entry level, but that does not look adequate. Believing our military members sacrifice enough and deserve good care and the introduction of professional social workers might prove to be a significant improvement towards addressing relationship problems, tensions with other members of the unit and traumatic events in the military

Suicides in the Indian Army

There has been a sharp rise in suicide rates in the Indian Army. Defense Minister, Mr. A K Antony said that the Indian army has lost three hundred and two jawans to suicide in the last three years (The Pioneer, 2012). In the Parliament, he also added that in six out of the three hundred and two cases, family members of the deceased branded the suicides as murders. The latest case of alleged suicide took place about a month ago when two jawans shot themselves with their service rifles in the border districts of Rajouri and Poonch in Jammu and Kashmir. (The Pioneer, 2012). It is not just the 1.2 million strong army, which is dealing with this faceless enemy, the paramilitary forces, especially the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) too are losing their men to fratricide and suicide. Forty-eight personnel from the CRPF were killed in gun battles between 2002 and 2007 but the force lost 46 personnel to suicide in 2007 alone (The pioneer, 2012). Col. (Ret.) P. K. Vasudeva says: “The trend in the third largest and one of the best disciplined armies in the world is a cause of grave concern for the defense ministry, political leaders, psychiatrists and socio-economic circles besides the army” (<https://www.ukessays.com/essays/history/an-argument-for-social-work-in-the-indian-military-history-essay.php>).

Data tabled in parliament shows that between 2011 and 2018, there were 891 deaths by suicide of members of the Indian armed forces (Army, Air Force and Navy). Suicides were highest in the Army, which reported that 707 personnel took their own lives between 2011 and 2018. The Air Force reported nearly 5 times fewer suicides at 148 over the eight years. The Navy has the lowest number of suicides, with 36 deaths reported over the same period. There was a spike in suicides in the Army in 2011, when 105 deaths were reported. The next highest suicides were in 2016, with 104 deaths. Last year, there were 80 deaths by suicide in the Army. The average deaths per year across the Indian Army, Air Force and Navy is 111. While there are an average of 88 deaths by suicide annually in the Army, the Air Force and the Navy average 18.5 and 4.5 deaths by suicide annually (<https://thewire.in/security/india-armed-personnel-suicides>)

Causes for Suicides

There are multiple factors which are responsible for the increasing number of suicides some of the reasons behind these suicides are because of occupational hazards such as long and continuous tenures of deployment, personnel also struggle with family issues, domestic problems and marital discord. Sometimes they have “perceived grievances” or financial problems.

What Military Social Workers Do

Military social workers typically combine counseling and guidance of individuals and families with development of an engagement in programs aimed at assisting military and veteran populations on a larger scale. Below is a more detailed description of the methods that military social workers use to help their clients.

Mental Health Counseling and Therapy

Military social workers can use a combination of clinical social work methods to assess, diagnose, prevent, and address their clients’ mental, emotional, behavioral, and relationship challenges. These methods include but are not limited to psychosocial and risk assessments, cognitive behavioral therapy and dialectical behavioral therapy, mindfulness based stress reduction, supportive psychotherapy, motivational interviewing, harm reduction techniques, and experiential therapeutic modalities such as equine-assisted psychotherapy, music therapy, art therapy, and role-playing.

Resource Navigation

There are a wide array of resources and programs that are available to members of all branches of the military. Knowing about and properly taking advantage of these programs, however, can be overwhelming or difficult for military personnel, who have busy and stressful schedules and who also must balance work with family life. Military social workers help military personnel, veterans and their families access the government and community resources that are available to them by educating their clients about the benefits they qualify for, guiding them through the process of applying for these benefits (ex. financial aid for school, free career counseling, medical benefits, etc.), and connecting them with other people and organizations that can help.

Crisis Intervention

For military personnel and families who are experiencing acute trauma or struggling with severe psychological, emotional, and/or behavioral challenges (for example, post-traumatic stress disorder, domestic and other types of violence, severe substance abuse, suicidal tendencies, etc.), social workers collaborate with a larger team of medical and/or mental health care professionals to intervene and treat the individuals involved in the crisis (including the spouses, children, relatives, and friends of military service members and/or veterans, if they are directly impacted by the crisis).

Advocacy

Social workers can serve as advocates for disadvantaged military personnel and their families. Active military service members who struggle with depression, sleep disorders, and/or substance abuse, veterans coping with physical disabilities, and spouses of military personnel who are experiencing financial hardships are just a few examples of demographics that could benefit from social work advocacy. Military social workers can engage with non-profit groups and advocacy organizations, and contact local, state, and national governments about issues that military population's face, in order to help ensure vulnerable military populations and their families receive the government and community support they need.

Program Development

Military social workers can also help develop, implement, and evaluate local, state, and national programs that aim to improve the well-being and opportunities for military populations and their loved ones. Such programs include but are not limited to family support programs, scholarships and other types of education support, employment assistance programs, and suicide awareness and prevention initiatives. Program development typically involves such responsibilities as researching target populations' needs, applying for and receiving funding, and building staffing and processes around certain objectives (for example, applying for funding and developing a team around an outreach program to help veterans address substance abuse).

Challenges Military Social Workers Face

Military social workers face numerous challenges on the job, including the complexity and severity of clients' challenges, the exposure to trauma vicariously through their clients' experiences, and limitations on resources available to optimally serve their target populations. This population typically has a multitude of major issues they are dealing with, such as anxiety/depression, chronic sleep disturbance, substance abuse, traumatic brain injury (TBI), and family issues, in addition to having been exposed to events that most of us can't even imagine. Military social workers who are embedded to military units or who select to be active members of the military on top of their social work duties encounter an additional set of challenges, one of which is adjusting to the culture and the fast pace of military life. The challenges that military social workers encounter as a result of their jobs can lead to significant stress and eventual burnout if clinicians are not careful. Helping their clients process extremely difficult or disturbing experiences can also negatively impact military social workers' mental and emotional health. Conscious and consistent self-care practices, seeking a strong support network of family, friends, and fellow professionals, and even engaging in their own therapy can help military social workers stay energized and engaged in their work long-term (<https://www.onlinemswprograms.com/features/guide-to-military-social-work.html>).

Conclusion

It is true that suicides and mental health issues in the army and other problems have its roots in the structure itself. It is a structural problem and to solve this problem complete structure need to be relocated. At this point of time it seems like an impossible task but we cannot do away with

the problem also. Soldiers, who give their life defending the borders of this country, need special assistance, because of them only we enjoy fearless nights and days here in peace. Dr. Aroona Broota, a clinical psychologist who has helped the Indian army deal with these problems among its ranks says: “adequate attention has not been given to the psychological states of the soldier” (Mishra, 2011). So, at the initial stage we can start with installation of some machinery into the army system where regiments of the Army has professional social workers or psychologists where soldiers can share problems and this might create some space for the soldiers to open up. Online help centres for the financial problems of the soldiers is another possibility, where social workers from the call-centres can deliver information about possible schemes available for soldiers (<https://www.ukessays.com/essays/history/an-argument-for-social-work-in-the-indian-military-history-essay.php>). Professional social workers can serve as commissioned officers and can be placed within the Army, Navy and Air Force medical departments. Army social work officers can be assigned a variety of health, mental health and human service roles. These assignments can also include program management, policy making, and research assignments.

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