**Working with Military and First Responders: When the Battlefield Comes to Your Office**

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Counselors wishing to work with the military and first responders must educate themselves on the unique characteristics of this population, which include the perception that seeking help is a weakness that may create a stigma at work, decreased promotion potential, or even job loss. This group is more likely to have complex developmental trauma in the first place (prior to entering their respective fields), more likely to have multiple trauma exposures, and more likely to experience ongoing exposure to trauma. The main diagnosis this group presents with is Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, with co-morbid diagnoses of substance abuse, anxiety, depression, traumatic brain injury, sexual trauma (MST), moral injury, anger issues, as well as previously existing mental health conditions. Barriers to treatment include fear of stigma, job loss, loss of promotion and career advancement, financial concerns, schedule constraints, trust/respect issues with provider, fear of hospitalization if expressing suicidal ideation, fear of being misunderstood, shame about actions taken in the course of duty, and access to treatment.

Research shows that the most effective treatment modalities for these populations include: Equine Assisted Psychotherapy, CBT, EMDR, Eco-therapy, Art/expressive therapies, and Somatic Experiencing, often supplemented with supportive therapies such as medication, yoga, mindfulness, and massage. The skills and qualities most essential for the therapist working with these groups include being trauma informed, earning the respect and trust of the client, understanding the dangers of introducing mindfulness too early in the treatment process, understanding and working with resistance to somatic experiencing, the concept of moral injury and the paramount importance of maintaining confidentiality.

This group may hold deep religious convictions but be struggling with their faith due to the unique challenges of their profession, making it imperative for the Christian counselor to employs great sensitivity and care in exploring issues of faith with these clients.

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