



# Evaluating the Role of Peer Counselors in Trauma-Informed Care for Veterans: Preliminary Findings

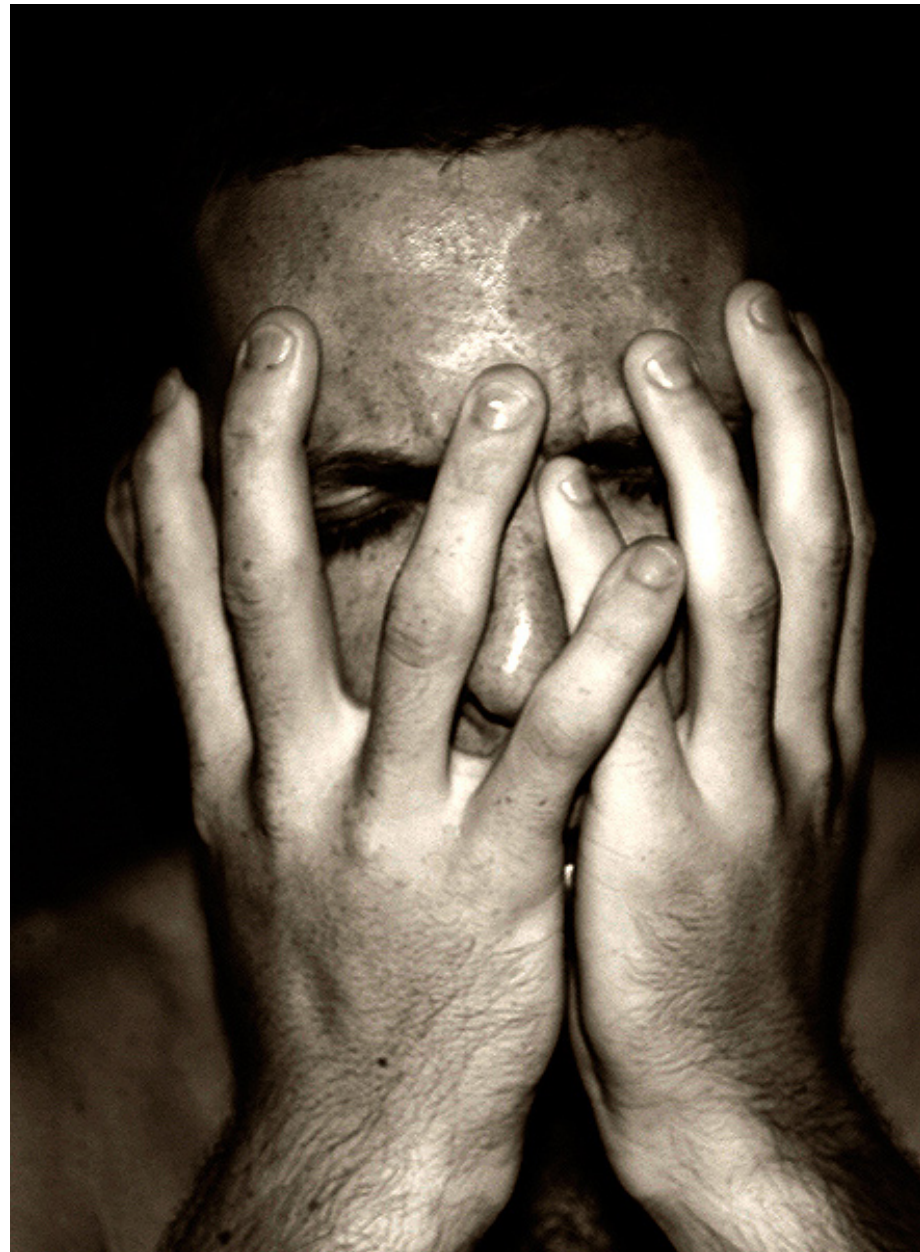
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## Introduction

- SAMHSA’s Jail Diversion and Trauma Recovery Program-Priority to Veterans implemented in 13 states
- Represents comprehensive approach to creating a trauma-informed criminal justice system
- Provides alternative sentences to those with trauma/PTSD histories
- Prioritizes veterans

## Jail Diversion Project Rationale

- Veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan at increased risk for post-traumatic stress
- One-third need mental health and/or substance abuse treatment.
- National movement toward developing alternative sentencing to help these individuals and reduce recidivism
- Project launched in RI in 2008.



## Treatment

- Trauma treatment offered was TAMAR:
  - Trauma, Addictions, Mental Health and Recovery
- Peer veteran counselors represented key component.
- Building on drug or mental health courts, veterans courts integrate veteran peers into service model
- Serve as essential part of the treatment team

## Peer Veteran Counselors

- Military history
- Matched to client in terms of military status and demographics
- Shared experience of trauma, not feeling understood when returned home

## Purpose of this Presentation

- This study represents a sub-study of the larger project.
- Examines role of peer veteran counselors, including:
  - Method used to study peer role
  - Qualitative and quantitative evidence
  - Challenges faced by peer counselors
  - Suggestions for future research

## Method

- Interviewed head of peer veteran counselor program as a study participant and means to facilitate enlisting additional participants
- Participants were interviewed for approximately one hour.
- Responses were recorded and audiotaped, transcribed, and analyzed.
- Quantitative and qualitative data collected.
- IRB approval obtained prior to study initiation.

## RESULTS

- N = 2; Male; Mean age = 68 years
- Five major themes emerged:
- **PEER TRAINING AND QUALIFICATION**
  - College bachelor’s degrees
  - Higher ranking officers
  - One-day training orienting to resources available to clients
  - Key experience is to go to court and observe
- **SOURCE OF INFORMATION**
  - Point of Contact
  - Referral Source
  - Emotional Support
  - Friend
- **CHALLENGES**
  - Knowledge about services available
  - Responsiveness of/connecting with client
- **MATCHING**
  - Mentor Selection
  - Mentee Eligibility
- **SERVICES PROVIDED**
  - Transportation
  - Company
  - Reminders

## DISCUSSION

- **STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT**
  - Program is still new
  - Very informal
  - Being developed “on the fly”
  - Leadership and respect are critical
  - No formal screening nor training
  - Ad hoc pairing with clients
  - No specific structure for meeting with clients nor for supervision
- **DEDICATION/MOTIVATION**
  - Experience as veterans central to perception of role
    - Filters into screening, perceptions of self and mentee
  - Personal experience returning home as veterans from Vietnam and wanting to revise the story for their clients
- **VOLUNTEER**
  - Reject roles of counselor and court advocate
  - Not being paid is important
  - No desire expressed for more training, supervision, manuals, etc.
- **PEER SELF-PERCEPTIONS**
  - Someone who has “been there”
  - Not professionals nor victims
- **SENSE OF SERVICE AND WANTING TO GIVE BACK ARE KEY**

## Data Analysis

- Qualitative data was transcribed and analyzed by NVivo Version 10.
- When bigger sample, will analyze quantitative data using SPSS.

## Challenges to Peer Involvement

- Uneven understanding of the value
- Lack of clear and consistent definitions of “peer”
- Risk of burnout
- Potential to “over-identify” with client rather than maintaining clear boundaries
- Blurring of role among peers, friends, and health care professionals

## Suggestions for Future Research

- Engage a larger sample including men and women from different military branches and from different experiences (countries, war vs. peacetime, etc.)
- Compare experiences of more structured, older peer programs vs. newer ones
- Compare different types of peer programs

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