

***Helping Military Veterans and Their Families Recover from the
Losses of War:
Emerging Perspectives and Complementary Approaches***

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Conference Evaluation Report



Office of Research

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Introduction

The fourth Statewide Conference on Veterans Mental Health was held at William James College, doing business as the Massachusetts School of Professional Psychology (WJC d.b.a. MSPP), on April 17th, 2015. Throughout this report, the acronym of WJC d.b.a. MSPP will be consolidated to 'WJC' for ease of read. The conference was sponsored by the Military and Veteran Psychology program at WJC/MSPP, with funding support from the Department of Veterans Services. The main purpose of the conference was to promote communication, discussion, and the exchange of information among mental health providers, educators and students interested in working with Veterans, Military Service Members, and their families.

This training conference showcased the emerging perspectives and strategies for meeting the mental health needs of Veterans and their family members. Following introductory remarks by Dr. Robert Dingman and Major General Robert Catalanotti (U.S. Army, Ret.), the program featured morning presentations by Mr. Stephen Xjarhjos, Dr. Roger Brooke, Dr. Chuck Drebing and a WJC Student Veteran Panel, all of who spoke about trends and practices for treatment of Military Veterans and their families. These presentations were followed by five afternoon workshops from which respondents chose to attend one. The workshops focused on the following topics:

1. Using Yoga Techniques with Combat Veterans
2. Expressive Therapies for Trauma Survivors
3. Therapeutic Mindfulness for Veterans
4. Peer Support Program for Veterans, and
5. Operation Delta Dog

This report describes and interprets the results of a survey that was enclosed in conference information packages that were distributed to all conference respondents. The survey and detailed results are available on request. They have not been included in the report in the interest of keeping it informative but brief. A total of 90 people attended the conference, of which 55 (61%) respondents responded to the conference evaluation survey.



Section I: Conference Respondent Profiles

This section contains information on respondent occupation, education, and how each found out about the conference. All the responses are depicted in pie charts that report the percentages for each section of the pie.

1. Respondent Occupation

The categorizations in Figure 1 below give us a relatively simple view of respondents' occupational responsibilities. Respondents represented a very diverse group of professionals working with Veterans and their families. Psychologists (27%) and Masters level clinicians (24%) accounted for the majority of the respondents. Masters level clinicians include: social workers, LMHC's and counselors; psychologists includes those with both PhD and PsyD. The "Other" category (35%) was the next largest group. The term "Other" includes people who could not be classified into any of the above – i.e. Senior Administrators, Case Managers, etc.

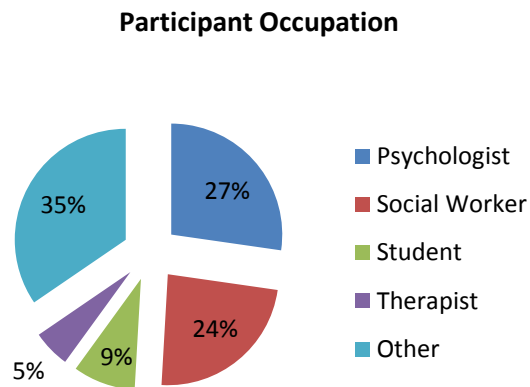


Figure 1: Respondent Occupation by percentages (N=55)



2. Respondent Education

For a breakdown of respondent education see Figure 2 below. A majority of the respondents had a minimum of a bachelor’s degree. Masters-level clinicians represented the largest group (52%), with counseling and social work being the two most popular degrees. The second largest group had doctoral degrees (30%), including PsyD and PhD.

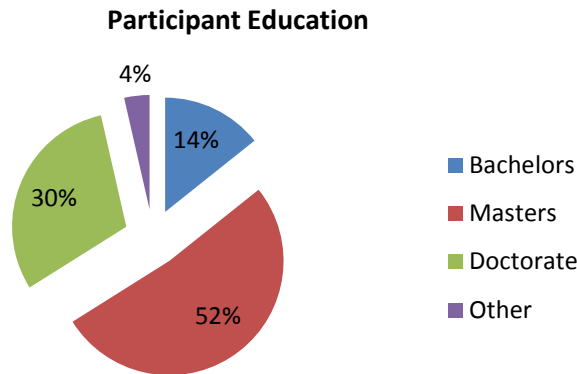


Figure 2: Highest Education Level of Respondents (N=55)

3. How did you hear about today’s event?

Figure 3 illustrates how respondents found out about the event. A majority of the respondents (59%) indicated that they heard about the *Helping Military Veterans and Their Families Recover from the Losses of War Conference* as a result of emails (23%), obtaining information from co-workers and supervisors (11%), and outreach efforts made by WJC and its faculty (25%). Several respondents attended the event as a result of information provided by the Department of Veterans Services (2%) and by the Home for our Troops (4%).

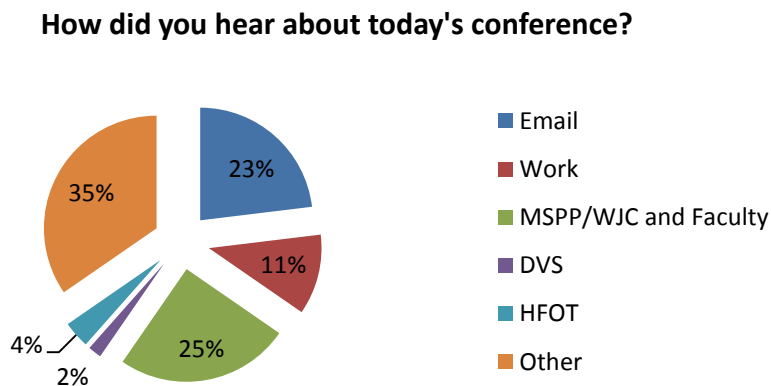


Figure 3: How Did You Hear About the Conference (N=55)



Section II: Overall Conference Experience

1. Overall Conference Experience

As shown in Table 1, the overall ratings for the conference were generally quite high, indicating that respondents had a very positive experience. Over 66% of respondents across all categories gave the conference the highest rating of “Very Good.” Additionally, the overall conference experience received a mean score of 4.85 out of 5.

Category	n	Mean	Very Poor	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good
Facilitators	55	4.85	0%	0%	2%	11%	87%
Speakers	55	4.91	0%	0%	2%	5%	93%
Content	54	4.83	0%	2%	0%	11%	87%
Materials	54	4.6	0%	2%	4%	27%	67%
Facilities	55	4.83	0%	2%	0%	11%	87%
Overall Experience	55	4.85	0%	0%	2%	11%	87%

Table 1: Overall Conference Experience

2. Respondent Distribution

Respondents were offered five workshops from which to choose, each with their own subject experts and content matter. All workshops were offered during the afternoon session only. Figure 4 below presents a detailed breakdown of the distribution of respondents across each workshop.

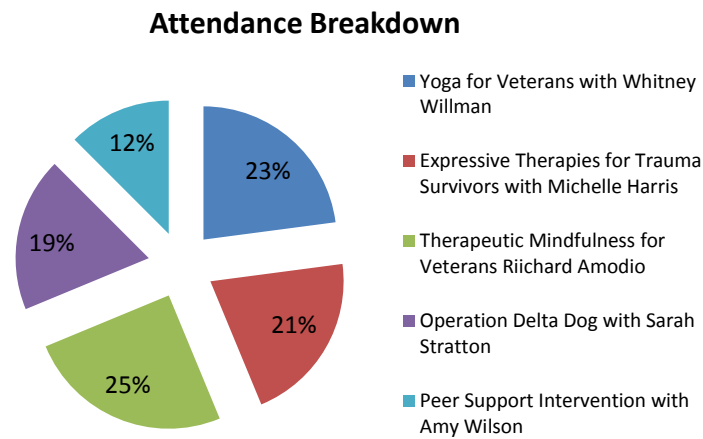


Figure 4: Afternoon Workshop Attendance (N=51)



3. Overall Rating of the Afternoon Sessions

The afternoon workshop sessions received high ratings. The majority of scores were at the upper end of the scale, indicating general positive outlook about the afternoon offerings. Overall, 64% of respondents found the afternoon workshop they attended to be helpful to their professional work. Table 2 below breaks down the afternoon session ratings in further detail.

Category	N	Mean	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Accurate	51	4.55	2%	0%	6%	26%	67%
Learning	51	4.55	2%	0%	6%	26%	67%
Knowledgeable	51	4.73	2%	0%	4%	12%	82%
Material	51	4.51	2%	0%	6%	29%	63%
Format	51	4.55	2%	2%	4%	23%	69%
Helpful	51	4.47	2%	0%	12%	22%	64%

Table 2: Overall Afternoon Sessions



Section III: Morning Session Presentation Ratings

1. A Goldstar Family Experience by Stephen Xjarjhos

As evident in Table 3, the presentation by Stephen Xjarjhos on Goldstar Families received high ratings. The session received high mean scores in each specific criterion, averaging a grand mean of 4.81. This suggests that respondents not only enjoyed the presentation but also took away information of value. Mr. Xjarjhos' presentation was also rated as being the most helpful aspect of the conference.

Category	n	Mean	Strongly				Strongly
			Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	
Accurate	55	4.75	2%	0%	2%	13%	83%
Learning	55	4.69	2%	0%	6%	11%	81%
Knowledgeable	55	4.89	2%	0%	0%	4%	94%
Material	55	4.82	2%	0%	2%	6%	90%
Format	55	4.85	2%	0%	2%	2%	94%
Helpful	55	4.76	2%	0%	4%	7%	87%

Table 3: A Goldstar Family Experience

2. The Soldier's Heart as a Moral and Spiritual Calling by Dr. Roger Brooke

As shown in Table 4, the presentation by Dr. Roger Brooke received favorable ratings, scoring a grand mean of 4.76. Approximately 87% of respondents agreed that Dr. Brooke's presentation was helpful to their professional work. Dr. Brooke's presentation was also rated among the most helpful aspects of the conference.

Category	n	Mean	Strongly				Strongly
			Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	
Accurate	55	4.73	0%	0%	4%	20%	76%
Learning	55	4.67	0%	2%	4%	20%	74%
Knowledgeable	55	4.87	0%	0%	2%	9%	89%
Material	55	4.75	0%	0%	4%	18%	78%
Format	55	4.82	0%	0%	4%	11%	85%
Helpful	55	4.75	0%	2%	2%	16%	80%

Table 4: The Soldier's Heart ratings

3. Student Panelists

The conference featured a panel of student Veterans from WJC. This session received very favorable ratings from respondents. In terms of perceived knowledge, information, and respondent interest, the panel consistently scored above a 4.4. The range of scores was also somewhat low, highlighting an overall consistency in respondent attitude toward the panel. See Table 5 for specific ratings.

Category	N	Mean	Strongly				Strongly Agree
			Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	
Interesting	54	4.50	2%	0%	11%	21%	66%
Informative	54	4.54	2%	0%	8%	24%	66%
Knowledgeable	54	4.65	2%	0%	8%	13%	77%

Table 5: Student Panel Ratings

4. The Recuperative Power of Serving Others by Dr. Chuck Drebing

As demonstrated in Table 6, the presentation by Dr. Chuck Drebing, entitled *The Recuperative Power of Serving Others: The Reciprocal Benefit of Veteran and Family Peer Support*, received high ratings. The presentation received a grand mean score of 4.6. Over 85% of respondents agreed that Dr. Drebing’s presentation was helpful to their professional work.

Category	N	Mean	Strongly				Strongly Agree
			Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	
Accurate	56	4.59	2%	0%	6%	24%	68%
Learning	56	4.61	4%	0%	2%	22%	72%
Knowledgeable	56	4.77	2%	0%	4%	9%	85%
Material	56	4.64	2%	0%	4%	22%	72%
Format	56	4.61	2%	0%	4%	26%	68%
Helpful	56	4.45	2%	0%	12%	24%	62%

Table 6: The Recuperative Power of Serving Others



Section IV: Afternoon Workshop Ratings

1. Using Yoga Techniques with Combat Veterans with Whitney Willman

As shown in Table 7, a majority of respondents (82%) who attended the afternoon yoga workshop found the workshop to be “good” or “very good” in terms of being helpful to their professional work.

Category	N	Mean	Very Poor	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good
Accurate	11	4.36	9%	0%	0%	27%	64%
Learning	11	4.18	9%	0%	9%	27%	55%
Knowledgeable	11	4.18	9%	0%	9%	27%	55%
Material	11	4.09	9%	0%	9%	36%	46%
Format	11	4.27	9%	0%	0%	36%	55%
Helpful	11	4.27	9%	0%	9%	18%	64%

Table 7: Yoga Ratings

2. Expressive Therapies for Trauma Survivors with Michelle Harris

As shown in Table 8, all of respondents (90%) who attended the afternoon Expressive Therapies workshop found the workshop to be “good” or “very good” in terms of being helpful to their professional work. Respondents rated all aspects of the workshop highly.

Category	N	Mean	Very Poor	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good
Accurate	11	4.9	0%	0%	0%	10%	90%
Learning	11	4.8	0%	0%	0%	20%	80%
Knowledgeable	11	5	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
Material	11	4.8	0%	0%	0%	20%	80%
Format	11	4.6	0%	10%	0%	10%	80%
Helpful	11	4.5	0%	0%	10%	30%	60%

Table 8: Expressive Arts Ratings

3. Therapeutic Mindfulness for Veterans with Dr. Richard Amodio

As shown in Table 9, the Therapeutic Mindfulness workshop with Dr. Richard Amodio was rated very highly with a grand mean score of 4.82. All of the respondents (100%) who attended the afternoon Mindfulness workshop found the workshop to be helpful to their professional work. Given the low range of scores, it can be assumed that respondents found this workshop to be beneficial across a wide range of areas.

Category	N	Mean	Very Poor	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good
Accurate	12	4.75	0%	0%	0%	25%	75%
Learning	12	4.75	0%	0%	0%	25%	75%
Knowledgeable	12	4.92	0%	0%	0%	8%	92%
Material	12	4.75	0%	0%	0%	25%	75%
Format	12	4.92	0%	0%	0%	8%	92%
Helpful	12	4.83	0%	0%	0%	17%	83%

Table 9: Therapeutic Mindfulness Ratings

4. Peer Support Program for Veterans with Amy Wilson

As shown in Table 10, respondents who attended the afternoon Peer Support workshop found the workshop to be a helpful across a range of areas. A majority of respondents (80%) found the description of the workshop to be accurate. Respondents (80%) also found the workshop to be helpful to their professional work.

Category	N	Mean	Very Poor	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good
Accurate	6	4	0%	0%	20%	60%	20%
Learning	6	4.6	0%	0%	0%	40%	60%
Knowledgeable	6	4.8	0%	0%	0%	20%	80%
Material	6	4.2	0%	0%	20%	40%	40%
Format	6	4.2	0%	0%	20%	40%	40%
Helpful	6	4.2	0%	0%	20%	40%	40%

Table 10: Peer Support Program Ratings



5. Operation Delta Dog with Sarah Stratton

As shown in Table 11, respondents who attended the afternoon Delta Dog workshop rated the workshop very highly, giving it a grand mean of 4.8. The low range of scores indicates that respondents found the workshop descriptions to be accurate, the workshop to be helpful to their professional work, and the presenter to be knowledgeable.

Category	N	Mean	Very Poor	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good
Accurate	9	4.7	0%	0%	11%	11%	78%
Learning	9	4.8	0%	0%	0%	22%	78%
Knowledgeable	9	5	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
Material	9	4.8	0%	0%	0%	22%	78%
Format	9	4.8	0%	0%	0%	22%	78%
Helpful	9	4.7	0%	0%	11%	11%	78%

Table 11: Peer Support Program Ratings



Section V: Takeaway Changes to Practice

1. Plan to Make Changes Based on Conference

In terms of the overall conference, 44 respondents stated that they plan to make changes to their practice or work based on the content learned from the conference, a majority of 82%. Only 10 respondents (18%) stated that they do not plan on making changes based on the conference. Figure 5 below shows the breakdown of responses.

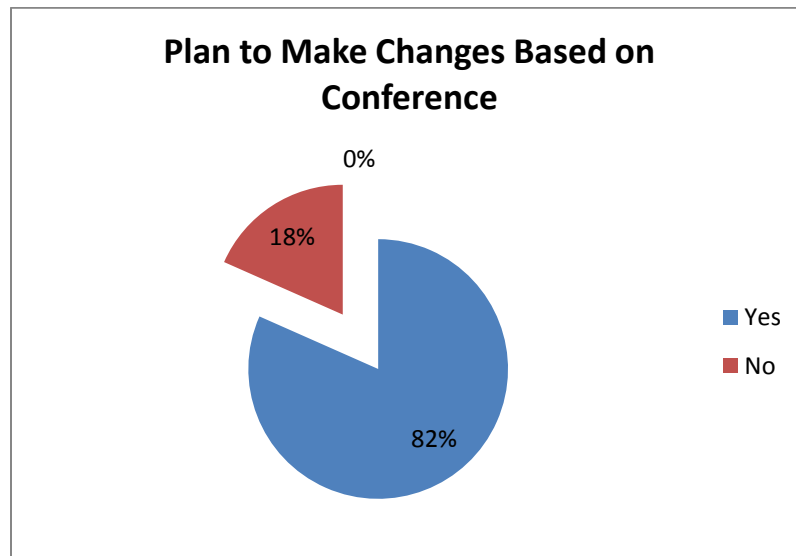


Figure 5: Plan to Make Changes Based on Conference (N=54)



2. Changes in Practice

When asked to describe one change they plan to make in their practice or interaction with Veteran clients as a result of participating in the conference, the responses fell into one of nine categories. The most popular changes listed were related to educating others (including peers, co-workers and students) on the information that respondents were given related to Veterans and their Families with 9 responses (24%). There were 5 respondents (14%) indicating a plan to incorporate mindfulness into their professional work as well as 5 respondents (14%) stating that they plan to volunteer with Veterans and/or their Families. There were approximately 4 respondents (11%) indicating that they would develop peer support groups for Veterans and Families and 4 respondents (11%) stating that they would incorporate expressive techniques into their professional work. The remainder of respondents fell into the following categories: incorporating yoga, rethinking PTSD, integrating other conference material into professional work, and educating Veterans using the information learned. Figure 6 below provides a visual breakdown of these findings. For more detailed information on how people intend to change their practice based on this conference please see Panel 1 below.

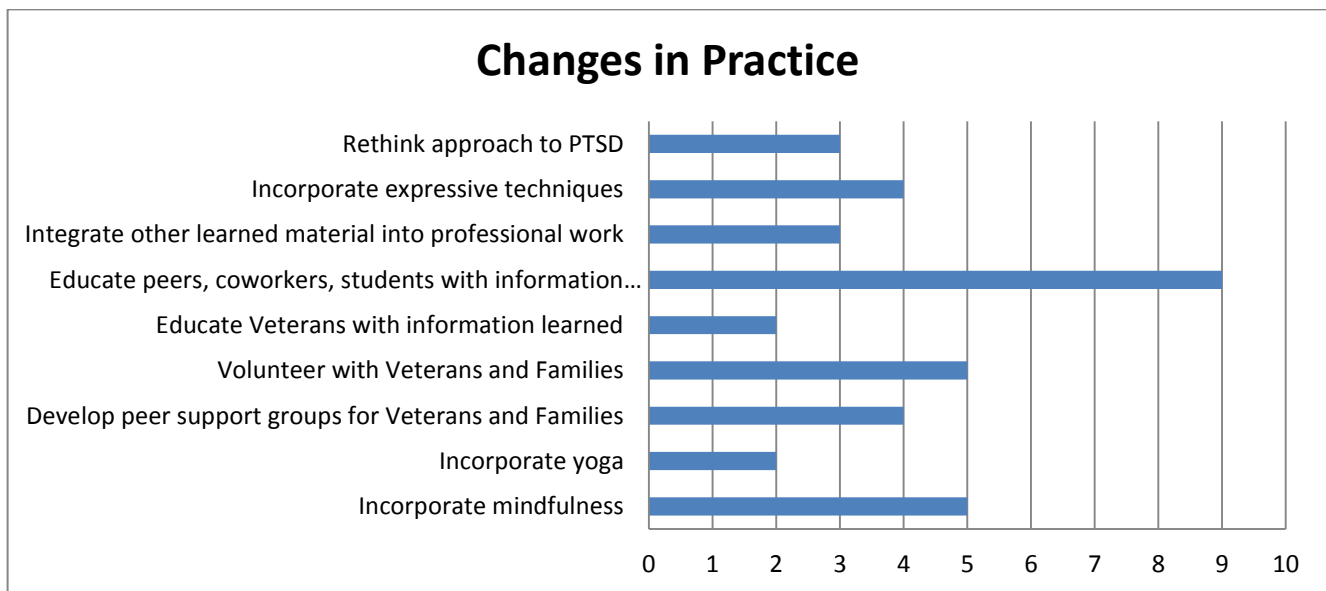


Figure 6: Changes in Practice (N=37)

Panel 1: Integrate Content into Practice

I will try to implement what I learned into my practice and also when I create new programs

Use of phenomenological strategies as part of the therapeutic process

Integrate information on the use of dreams (from Dr. Brooke)

I will look at Veterans as individuals and not expect anything- just try to work it out in the moment



Section VI: Conference Effectiveness

1. Most Helpful Aspect

As seen in Figure 7, when respondents were asked to list the most helpful aspect of the conference, responses fell into seven general categories, with some respondents stating more than one aspect as being the most helpful. The most helpful aspect, with 15 responses (29%), was the presentation by Stephen Xjarhjos on being a Goldstar Family member. Following this was the general content areas that were focused on during the conference, with 14 responses (27%). The afternoon workshops, Dr. Brooke's presentation, opportunity to network, student Veteran panel, and Dr. Drebing's presentation for a combined 26 responses (50%).

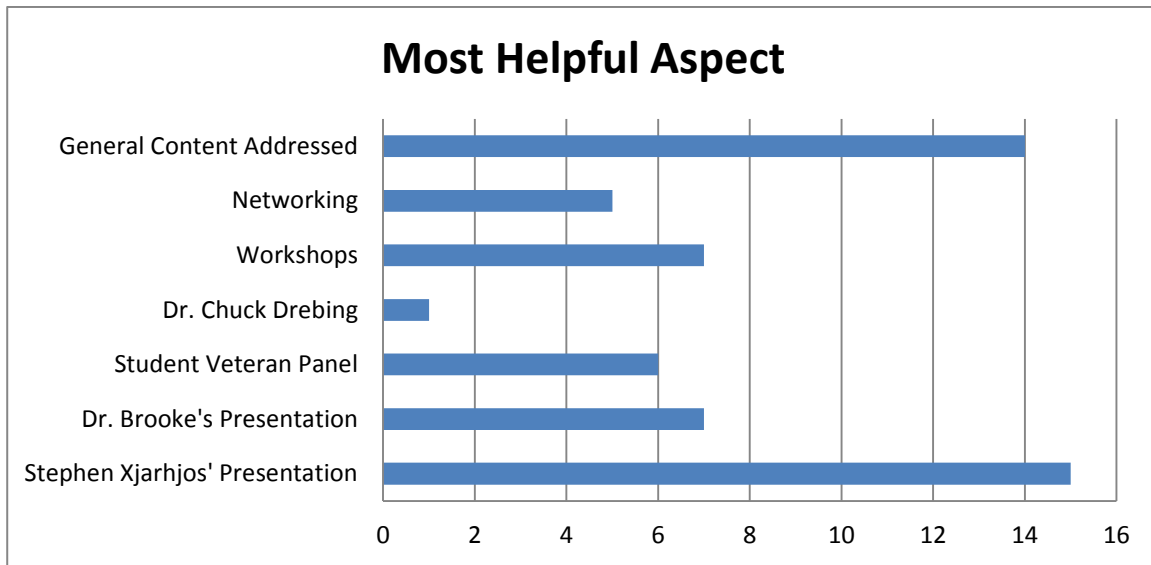


Figure 7: Most Helpful Aspect (N=52)

2. Least Helpful Aspect

Respondents' opinions of the least helpful aspect of the conference fell into nine separate categories that can be seen in Figure 8 below. The most common answer was the peer support presentation, with 3 responses (20%). The second most prevalent complaints were the technical difficulties, time constraints, student veteran panel, and group discussions, with 2 responses each (13%). The complaint of the conference being "overly simplistic" and "overly academic," as well as Stephen Xjarhjos' presentation and the lack of available resources all received one response (10%).

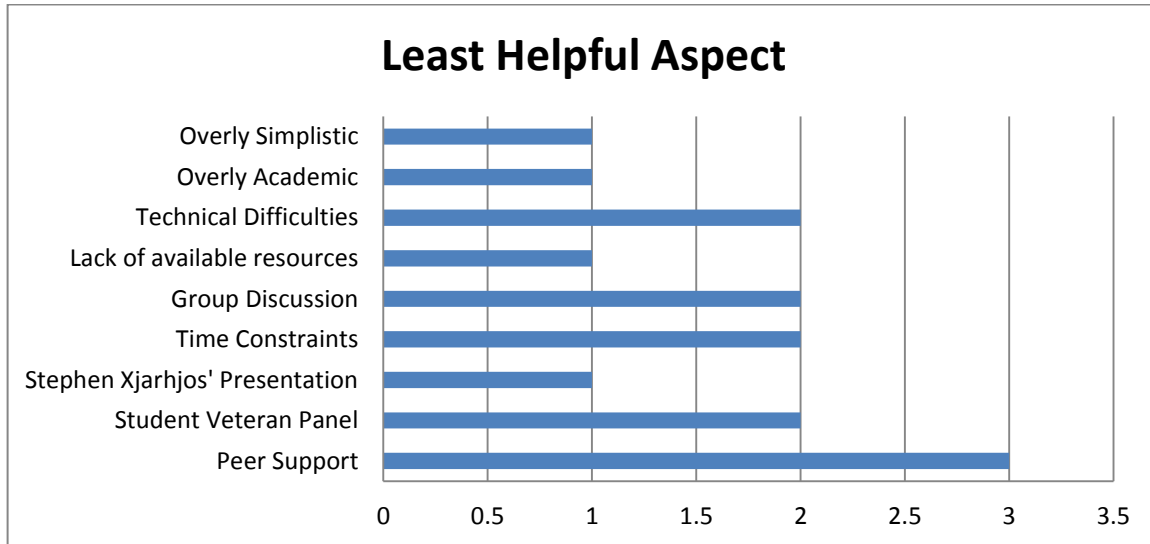


Figure 8: Least Helpful Aspect (N=15)



Section VII: Recommendation Rating

1. How Likely to Recommend to Others

When asked how likely they were to recommend this conference to others, on a scale from one, “least likely”, to ten, “most likely”, the most common response was a rating of ten with 38 responses (73%). The second most common response was a rating of nine, with 9 responses (17%), indicating that most respondents were inclined to recommend the conference to others. A rating of eight had 5 responses (10%). Only two respondents rated the conference as a six or lower, with one response of rating six (.02%) and one response of rating three (.02%). The breakdown of all ratings can be seen in Figure 9 below.

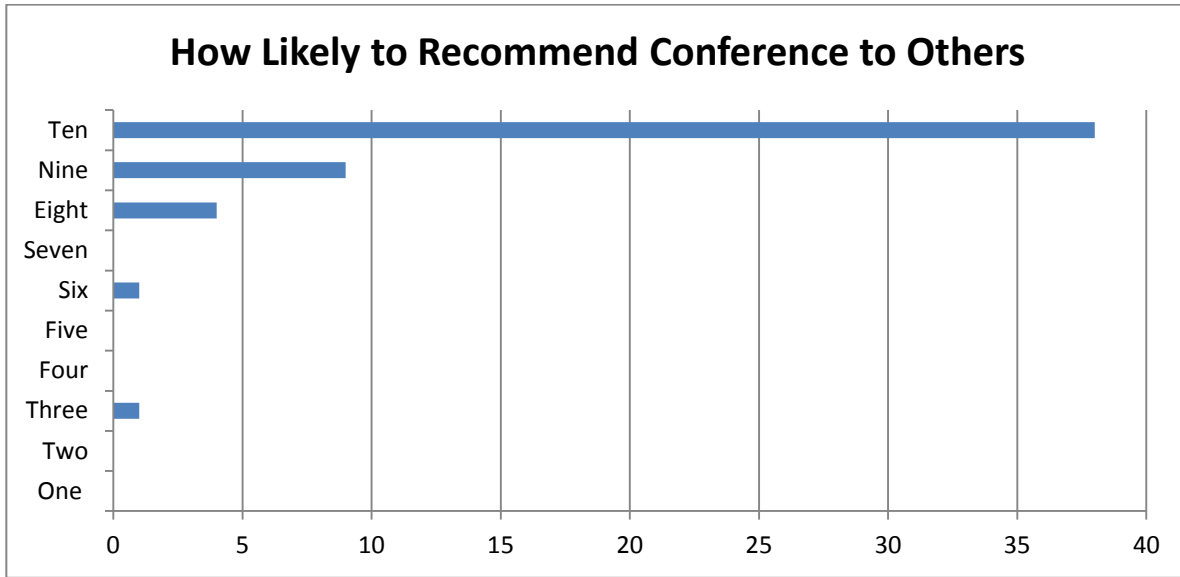


Figure 9: How Likely to Recommend to Others (N=52)

Section VIII: Conclusion

Given that the survey rating results indicate that the conference was received positively overall, it is likely that several aspects from this year's panels will be replicated in future conferences. The following discussion will look more closely at a few specific areas/panels and their individual successes as well as areas that can be improved upon moving forward.

1. Successes

To begin, the presentation by Stephen Xjarhjos on being a Goldstar Family member was, not surprisingly, the most helpful presentation indicated by respondents. Several factors could be responsible for this (e.g. personal interest in the topic, emotional appeal, or applicability to working with Veteran and military families). However, it should be stated that Mr. Xjarhjos' presentation highlighted the need for a greater understanding of the impact of military service and loss on family members.

The various workshops that were offered during the afternoon session were also very highly reviewed and conference respondents rated "workshops" as one of the more helpful aspects of the conference. Providing respondents with the opportunity to engage in a treatment technique more thoroughly can be reasonably assumed to be of great benefit. These Veteran-focused workshops provide a type of building block for respondents to develop skills to incorporate within the mental health field.

2. Opportunities for Growth

"Peer Support Group," "Student Veteran Panel," "Group Discussion," "Time Constraints", "Lack of Available Resources (i.e. Stations for information)," and "Technical Difficulties" were respectively listed highest in survey results of "Least Helpful Aspect" of the conference. While the Peer Support Group presentation and Student Veteran Panel were listed as helpful aspects of the conference, the specific focus of each of these presentations and its usefulness should be considered and addressed prior to future conferences. Additionally, making resources available to respondents should be addressed for future events. A few suggestions or possible conference additions in this regard include: informational handouts (including key points from each panel), printouts of presentations with space for notes/questions, and/or a "Provider Resources" handout (this could include web links, addresses, and phone numbers to any topic-applicable agency or site). The addition of a "Suggested Readings" handout might also help in this regard. All of these could, in theory, be posted on a conference web site prior to the conference or be made available after the conference via a link provided to respondents. The time constraints and technical difficulties may be addressed by developing a more workable conference schedule in the future that takes into account potential difficulties and setbacks.

3. Wrap-Up

From the evaluation survey results, it is clear that the 2015 *Helping Military Veterans and Their Families Recover from the Losses of War* conference was a successful forum that facilitated learning and professional growth for respondents. In particular, most respondents appreciated the opportunity to gain insight into Veteran needs through actual Veterans' perspectives.



The overall effect of the conference was to increase understanding of our Veterans' situations by addressing and discussing the wide range of concerns they face. We discussed what has been done in the past, what can still be incorporated, and introduced to our community new ways that civilians and fellow Veterans alike can help prevent suicide and other problems that arise following deployment. Respondents reported that they thoroughly enjoyed Stephen Xjarhjos sharing his perspective, insights, and experiences. He reminded us that the grieving process for the family of service members is not simple nor is it linear. Additionally, he explained how when our Veterans return from deployment with emotional and psychological burdens to bear, we must give them and their families' therapeutic space and help them to move at their own speed in treatment. We want them to know that we are fostering a supportive community for Veterans coming in to work with us. Besides being an opportunity to showcase our military-related programs and the work we do, this event also helped us honor our Veterans by doing more than just saying "thank you". Appreciation is abundant, but gratitude itself is not a substitute for compassionate, effective, and professional care

In closing, it would be of great benefit for the results of the conference evaluation to be carefully considered by organizers of future conferences at WJC focused on work with Veterans. Utilizing and making changes based on survey data will ensure that future conferences continue to provide the best possible experience for attendees and thus the greatest possible positive impact on the populations they serve.