

**2017 ISPN Foundation
Joyce Fitzpatrick Psychiatric Nursing Research Grant Recipient**

Sara Jones, PhD, APRN, PMHNP-BC

I would like to thank ISPN for awarding me the 2017 ISPN Foundation Psychiatric Nursing Research Grant! This funding has been instrumental in launching my program of research focused on the mental health needs of first responders!

In brief, this study aimed to characterize the mental health profile of Arkansas' first responders, and explore their perceptions of mental health problems and barriers and facilitators to help-seeking. In collaboration with community partners, an anonymous online survey was distributed statewide; it included brief assessments of various mental health problems that are known to affect first responders. Two-hundred and twenty first responders started the survey, and analysis shows prevalence rates of: 25.6% for PTSD; 28% for moderate to severe anxiety; 14.2% for major (moderate-severe to severe) depression; 20.2% for harmful/ hazardous drinking, 10.6% for at alcohol dependence; and, 34.4% for high-risk for suicidal behaviors. I also conducted interviews with individual first responders to understand how they view this topic. Preliminary analysis of 28 interviews already adds to our knowledge about first responders' perceptions regarding help-seeking. For example, a limited number have sought help through services that are currently available to them, but they report negative experiences with these services that further inhibit them from seeking help again.

These findings are being used to guide future research, including an R21 application to the National Institutes on Mental Health. The proposed study will use focus groups to further explore first responders' experiences and perceptions of existing mental health services. Then, product development processes grounded in the focus-group findings will be used to identify and conceptualize essential components of a mental health program to better address the mental health needs of first responders. In the future, this multi-stage research agenda will include development and implementation of a tailored mental health program consisting of various services that can be generalizable to first responders statewide, with an overall goal of improving the mental health of first responders. With strong partnerships, findings can be integrated into policy and funding-related decision making to sustain the delivery of high-quality mental health services for this at-risk population.

Study findings have been disseminated at state and national venues, targeting both nurses and fire/EMS professionals, and will be presented at the 2018 ISPN Annual Conference. The study has also received press attention by National Public Radio, which has elicited calls from across the nation.

Perhaps most importantly, however, is that this study has initiated significant discussion about practices and policies related to the mental health of first responders. First responders and mental healthcare providers are finally talking about this, and are ready

to address this very important issue! With continued efforts, and thanks to this grant, I believe this research has initiated the change we hope to see in the world!

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