

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



**Focus:**  
Multiple  
Branches

## Race and Incarceration in an Aging Cohort of Vietnam Veterans in Treatment for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Coker, K. L., & Rosenheck, R. (2014). Race and incarceration in an aging cohort of Vietnam veterans in treatment for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). *Psychiatric Quarterly*, 85(1), 79-89. doi:10.1007/s11126-013-9274-4.

**SUMMARY:** Administrative records of intake assessments of 31,707 Veterans seen in Veteran's Affairs (VA) posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) programs were examined to discern patterns of incarceration over time (from 1993-2011). Rates of incarceration declined over time. Black Veterans were more likely than White Veterans to have a lifetime history of incarceration.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Sixty-three percent of Veterans reported a history of incarceration in 1993; 43% endorsed this experience in 2011.
- Incarceration rates were greater for Black than White Veterans throughout the study.
- In 2011, 33% of White Veterans reported a history of incarceration, and 59% of Black Veterans reported this history.
- There was a 28% decline in White Veterans and 9% decline in Black Veterans in incarceration rates over the study period.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Enhance education, activities, and curriculum related to coping behaviors and dealing with stress
- Develop written materials for deployed Service members that focus on emotion regulation and interpersonal relationships
- Offer support services to family members of justice-involved Service members

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend partnerships among military-based and community-based programs to help military families feel more comfortable accessing resources that are not on installations
- Continue to support programs that incorporate concurrent mental health treatment for Service members who are incarcerated
- Recommend education for service providers around the possible effects of incarceration on Service members' families

This product is the result of a partnership funded by the Department of Defense between the Office of Military Community and Family Policy and the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture through a grant/cooperative agreement with The University of Minnesota.



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## METHODS

- Administrative VA data on all White and Black Veterans who sought treatment from VA specialized intensive PTSD programs between 1993-2011 were used.
- Measures of traumatic experiences, psychiatric diagnoses, and service connection status (disability) were gathered.
- Statistical analyses examined the relationships among variables.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Thirty-one thousand seven hundred and seven Veterans' data were included.
- The average age of the sample was 53.30 years (SD = 5.80 years); 54% were separated/divorced and 39% were married; and 73% were White while 27% were Black.
- Fifty-four percent reported incarceration at the time of admission to the hospital.

## LIMITATIONS

- Only Black and White Veterans were included; these results may not apply to Veterans of other races and ethnicities.
- All data were self-reported which may introduce biases.
- The population is limited to Veterans seeking intensive treatment for PTSD; therefore, the findings may not extend to Veterans in other settings.
- Data were not provided on the length of incarceration or the nature of the convictions, which is important information needed to better understand the findings.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Explore racial disparities in incarceration with other non-White groups
- Explore the decline in incarceration rates over time and investigate if these rates are declining among civilians as well
- Evaluate the effectiveness of programs designed to reduce incarceration for Service members with mental health conditions

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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