

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

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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

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