

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Incarceration Among Male Veterans: Relative Risk of Imprisonment and Differences Between Veteran and Nonveteran Inmates

Greenberg, G. A., & Rosenheck, R. A. (2012). Incarceration among male veterans: Relative risk of imprisonment and differences between veteran and nonveteran inmates. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 56(4), 646-667. doi:10.1177/0306624X11406091

SUMMARY: The risk of incarceration for male Veterans compared with non-Veterans was examined through the use of national surveys of jail and prison inmates. Differences were examined based on age and race/ethnicity as well as the prevalence of certain risk factors (e.g., health status, socioeconomic characteristics, exposure to trauma). The researchers proposed that differences in incarceration rates might be attributed to changes in recruiting practices that raised the average qualifications and socioeconomic status of recruits who enrolled in the all volunteer force over time.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Male Veterans in the age group that entered military service in the early years of the all volunteer force (1976-1985) were at greater risk of incarceration than their non-Veteran peers, whereas those who enlisted in the later years of the all volunteer force were at lower risk.
- White Veterans tended to have greater rates of incarceration than their non-Veteran peers; Black and Latino/Latina Veterans, on the other hand, had lower rates of incarceration than their non-Veteran peers.
- Veterans in state and federal prisons were more likely than non-Veterans to have reported a diagnosis of mental illness in the previous year, at least one night in a mental hospital, or professional counseling in the year before arrest or since incarceration.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer presentations to Service members and their families that include information about how to access all resources and benefits available to Service members to assist them in managing mental illness
- Provide outreach to Service members at risk for incarceration, offering support in an effort to avoid legal difficulties
- Provide services for Service members and their families during incarceration to empower them with information about resources upon release from prison or jail, thereby facilitating a smoother transition.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Encourage the development and continuation of programs that can promote resilience in Service members, their partners and children
- Recommend continued monitoring of challenges faced by Service members and their families as they transition out of after military service to strategically plan how to mitigate challenges before they would lead to adverse outcomes
- Recommend partnerships among military-based and community-based programs to help military families feel more comfortable participating in services and accessing resources that are not on installations

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METHODS

- Two national data sets of jail and prison inmates from 2002 and 2004 were used to draw a sample of incarcerated men aged 19 years and older.
- Data on race, age, and gender were gathered from the 2000 Decennial Census.
- Data were analyzed to determine Veterans' risk of incarceration and to compare incarcerated Veterans and non-Veterans based on several risk factors (e.g., age, socioeconomic characteristics, clinical status).

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants included 4,025 jail inmates from the 2002 Survey of Jail Inmates and 12,986 prison inmates from the 2004 Survey of State and Federal Inmates.
- The final sample was representative of the entire incarcerated adult male population of the United States (approximately 12% of which are Veterans) with the exception of those in military prisons. Military branch information was not specified.
- No information was provided on the race/ethnicity and age of the sample.

LIMITATIONS

- Because of the cross-sectional nature of data collection, the authors were unable to determine the extent to which military service may have been associated with the development of mental health and substance abuse issues.
- The absence of information about the timing of the trauma and the onset of mental health problems precluded consideration of possible connections between military service and these health indicators and outcomes.
- Only three types of mental disorders were measured, excluding posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among others, and measures of mental health and substance use conditions did not evaluate all DSM-IV criteria; these gaps limit the ability to accurately compare Veteran with non-Veteran inmates.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine the incarceration rates of Veterans as compared to non-Veterans in the post OIF/OEF/OND era
- Explore the role of combat exposure as related to later incarceration as exposure to military trauma may be associated with incarceration rates among Veterans
- Conduct longitudinal studies that involve Service members that examine their mental health and risk of incarceration over time

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