

How Being Trauma-Informed Improves Criminal Justice System Responses

Fact Sheet: Veterans

America's New Veterans

Since 2001, over two million troops have been deployed, with large numbers exposed to combat conditions. Individuals who have experienced combat are, as a result, highly vulnerable to traumatic stress disorders.

However, traumatic stress disorders may not only result from combat experiences, but may also be due to experiences both before and after war zone deployment. In a study (Elbogen et al., 2010) of 676 veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, researchers found:



- 19% had a history of incarceration
- 8% had at least one parent with a criminal history
- 40% witnessed family violence
- 34% had been physically or sexually abused when they were under the age of 18
- 81% served in a war zone
- 22% reported traumatic brain injury during combat
- 86% reported war zone trauma

In addition to combat trauma, veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan face various stressors as part of their service experience (SAMHSA, 2011):

- Long deployments
- Multiple deployments
- Difficulty adapting back to civilian life

Veterans in Treatment

If veterans who need treatment don't get it, they are probably at greater risk for involvement in the criminal justice system.

- 80% of post-deployed soldiers at risk for PTSD are not referred for care (Government Accountability Office, 2006)
- Less than 10 percent were referred for treatment after separation from the armed services (Hoge et al., 2006)

High Rates of Suicide

While only 1% of Americans have served in the military, former service members represent 20% of all suicides in the United States.

- Factors that increase suicide risk include PTSD

- Not all mental health challenges or suicides are directly caused by military service – for example, 31% of Army suicides are associated with factors originating prior to service (Harrell & Berglass, 2011)

Incarcerated Veterans

While 60% of incarcerated veterans meet the threshold for a PTSD diagnosis, only 20% of the trauma they report is military-service related (King County Jail Study). This finding would suggest that in many individuals, it may be that other traumatic experiences on top of service-related trauma are what ultimately lead to PTSD.

In a study of 552 individuals who participated in 12 trauma and veteran focused jail diversion programs across the country:

- 94% experienced non-military trauma
- 73% experienced trauma before age 18
- 68% experienced physical violence by someone they knew
- 19% experienced sexual molestation by someone they knew

Further, of the 87 individuals in that study who actually served in combat zone:

- 82% saw someone get injured/killed
- 78% saw, smelled, or handled a dead body
- 78% patrolled areas with landmines/IEDs
- 75% were shot at or received fire
- 69% were attacked or ambushed
- 35% were wounded or injured
- 31% felt responsible for the death of someone

Women

Women make up more than 7% of the veteran population. The rates of trauma exposure reported by female veterans are higher than the trauma exposure rate of the civilian population. Among female veterans:

- 81-93% have experienced any type of trauma
- 38%-64% have experienced lifetime sexual assault
- 27%-49% have experienced child sexual abuse
- 24%-49% have experienced adult sexual assault
- 30%-45% have experienced military sexual trauma
- 4%-31% have experienced combat exposure

Female veterans are more likely to experience sexual assault when compared to their male counterparts.



While females are equally susceptible to combat as males, they are less likely than males to witness or experience traumatic events during combat (Zinzow et al., 2007).



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Further Reading and References

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