

Understanding Military Culture, Veterans Demographics and Experience

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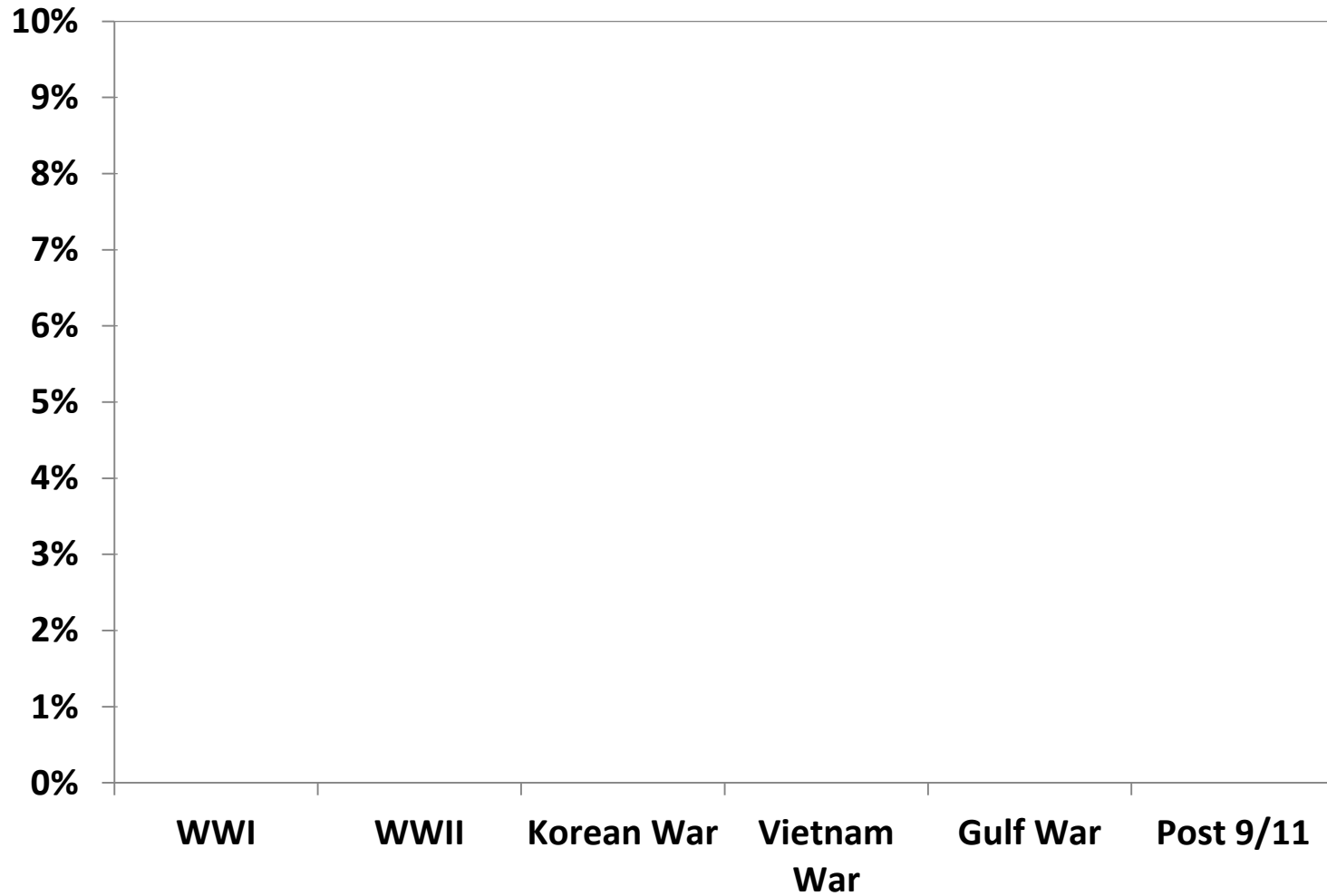
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Common stereotypes about veterans:

- “Crazy” or “ticking time-bombs”
- “Killers” and “war mongers”
- All have PTSD or TBI issues
- All are “conservative” politically
- They are all disabled
- They aren’t as intelligent or intellectual
- All men
- They can all utilize the VA
- All in combat or in combat roles



Military Service in U.S.



How Many Have Served in OIF & OEF?

Since Sept. 11, 2001,

2,770,000

service members have served on 5.4 million deployments.



6,900 service members have died
52,000 have been wounded



Increasingly Diverse & Complex Military

More ethnic minorities → **30% of Armed Services**

More women → **14% of Active Duty**

In relationships → **56% married**

Educated → **94% H.S. Diploma/GED**

Young & Old

- **Active Duty** → **42% deployed are 17-25yrs**
- **Reserve** → **56% deployed are 30yrs +**



DEMOGRAPHICS 2010
Profile of the Military Community
Department of Defense

Military Culture - What's in a Name?

- **Army**

- Soldier

- **Marine Corps**

- Marine

- **Navy**

- Sailor

- **Air Force**

- Airman

- **Coast Guard**

- Coast Guardsman



Elements of Military Culture

- **Discipline** – imposed and expected
- **Structure** – what happens when this is gone?
- **Aggression** *is almost always the answer*
- **Respect** – for authority and for ones self
- **Strength** – not asking for help
- **Honor** – used to being trusted
- **Team** – responsibility, problems, solution are shared

Military

Civilian

Direct Communication

Indirect Communication

Conflicts **Addressed**

Conflicts **Avoided** (Diplomacy)

Rules Of Conduct **Explicit**

Rules Of Conduct **Implicit**

Language **Function**

Language **Ascetic**

Authority = **Respect / Formality**

Authority = **Peer / Informality**

Daily Structure **High**

Daily Structure **Low**

Emphasis On **Outcome**

Emphasis On **Process**

Tight Community Bonds

Loose Community Bonds

Military as CULTURE

- Servicemembers live in a unique cultural space. Like all cultures they have:
 - Subcultures that are nuanced and specific
 - Unique Language and humor
 - Social norms
 - Shared values
 - Explicit & implicit rules of behavior

Coming Home:

Transitioning to Civilian Life
after Military Service &
Deployments

Typical Transition Challenges

- **Feeling separate.** Vet has changed, and others too
- **Managing expectations** to be the same as before
- **Finding employment** – choosing a career
- **Rebuilding community** – connecting to old friends
- **Lack of daily structure** – what should I do today?
- **Finding excitement** in every day activities
- **Becoming easily annoyed with civilians** who take things less seriously or are too “laid back”

Typical Transition Challenges

- **Complicated worldview:** many veterans find it difficult to integrate (or communicate) their acquired worldview with their civilian lives and civilian peers.
- Adjusting to new implicit cultural norms

Incarcerated Veterans

- Greatest predictive factor is substance abuse
- Younger veterans, National Guard & Reservists are at increased risk of alcohol related problems.
- PTSD increases likelihood of violence
 - Domestic violence associated with severity of PTSD
 - Deployments increase rate of child maltreatment

Mental Health Challenges

Building Resilience in Student
Veterans

Mental Health Challenges

The VA conducted a study of post 9/11 veterans from 2009-2011:

- 10% with Traumatic Brain Injury
- 29% with PTSD
- 40% with pain
- 6% with all of the above

(Cifu et al, 2013)

Veteran Disabilities

- 43% of Iraq & Afghanistan veterans have VA service-connected disabilities = 875,000 veterans
- Average disabilities per veteran =

Most Common Disabilities

- Tinnitus
- Hearing loss
- Lumbosacral or cervical strain
- Limitation of flexion, knee
- PTSD
- Migraines
- Diabetes
- Arthritis of the spine
- Paralysis of the sciatic nerve
- Scars
- Ankle trouble
- Defective hearing
- High blood pressure
- Traumatic Brain Injury
- Sleep Apnea

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a stress disorder that can occur following exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury or sexual violence.

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

- Directly experiencing
- Witnessing in person
- Learning that traumatic event occurred to family or close friend (violent)
- Extreme repeated exposure to details.

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

- **Reliving** (re-experiencing memories & intrusive thoughts)
- **Avoiding** (triggers & reminders)
- ***Hyper-aroused*** (overwhelming feelings)
- **Numb & Detached** (other people, activities)

Common *Fight or Flight* Triggers

- Someone standing too close
- Strangers
- Feeling cornered, trapped or stuck
- Feeling out of control & overwhelmed
- Reminders or associations (tiger or kitten)
- Disorder – lack of order & chaos
- Being surprised or startled

Traumatic Brain Injury

The “signature wound” of the current conflicts



Typical Symptoms of TBI

- **Cognition** (thinking, memory, and reasoning)
- **Sensory processing** (sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell)
- **Communication** (expression and understanding)
- **Behavior or mental health** (impulsivity, anxiety, depression, personality changes, aggression, acting out, and social inappropriateness)

mTBI

What you *might not* see:



Chronicle/Darren Breese

Resilience

Resilience is the ability to adapt in the aftermath of trauma or extreme stress and preserve a high level of psychological functioning

(APA, 2015)

How Do We Think About Resilience?

Qualities of Resilience

- Individual
- Independent
- Strong
- Character
- Perseverant
- Determined
- Has GRIT



Understanding Resilience

Resilience is a *PROCESS* that evolves over time *WITH OTHER PEOPLE*

- Social Support
- Social connectedness
- Purpose in Life
- Altruism
- Gratitude
- Emotional Stability



Social Support

Social Support

- **Social support** is the perception and actuality that one is cared for, has assistance available from other people, and that one is part of a supportive [social network](#).
- These supportive resources can be emotional, tangible (e.g., financial assistance), informational (e.g., advice), or companionship (e.g., sense of belonging)
- The perception that someone's got your back.

Social Support

Found to provide huge benefits

- Increased self-efficacy
- Increased affect regulation – keeps you calm
- People with social support have lower rates of depression, PTSD, overall anxiety, eating disorders, social phobia
- **Suicide:** Studies have found social support to be a significant protective factor against attempted suicide.

Why We Say Thank You

Thank You

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