

Discrimination and PTSD: Barriers faced by African American Veterans with PTSD

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Introduction

Suicide, homelessness, and unemployment are repercussions surrounding PTSD. There are policies and measures taken to protect these veterans with PTSD, but are they equitable? Studies from the National Institute of Health revealed that African American veterans are more likely to screen positive for PTSD than their white counterparts with a rating of 10.1% vs. 5.9% respectively (Merians et al.). According to Racial differences in Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Symptoms among African American and Caucasian male veterans from the National Library of Medicine, African American veterans have worse PTSD symptomatology than their white counterparts (Coleman et al.). Discrimination of African American veterans is prevalent in the United States and the effects are detrimental to these veterans.

Research Question:

How does discrimination experienced by African American veterans with PTSD contribute to mistrust and barriers in accessing disability benefits?

Thesis Statement:

The discrimination African American veterans with PTSD face in accessing medical care and awarding of benefits in the United States has led to continued mistrust of the healthcare system.

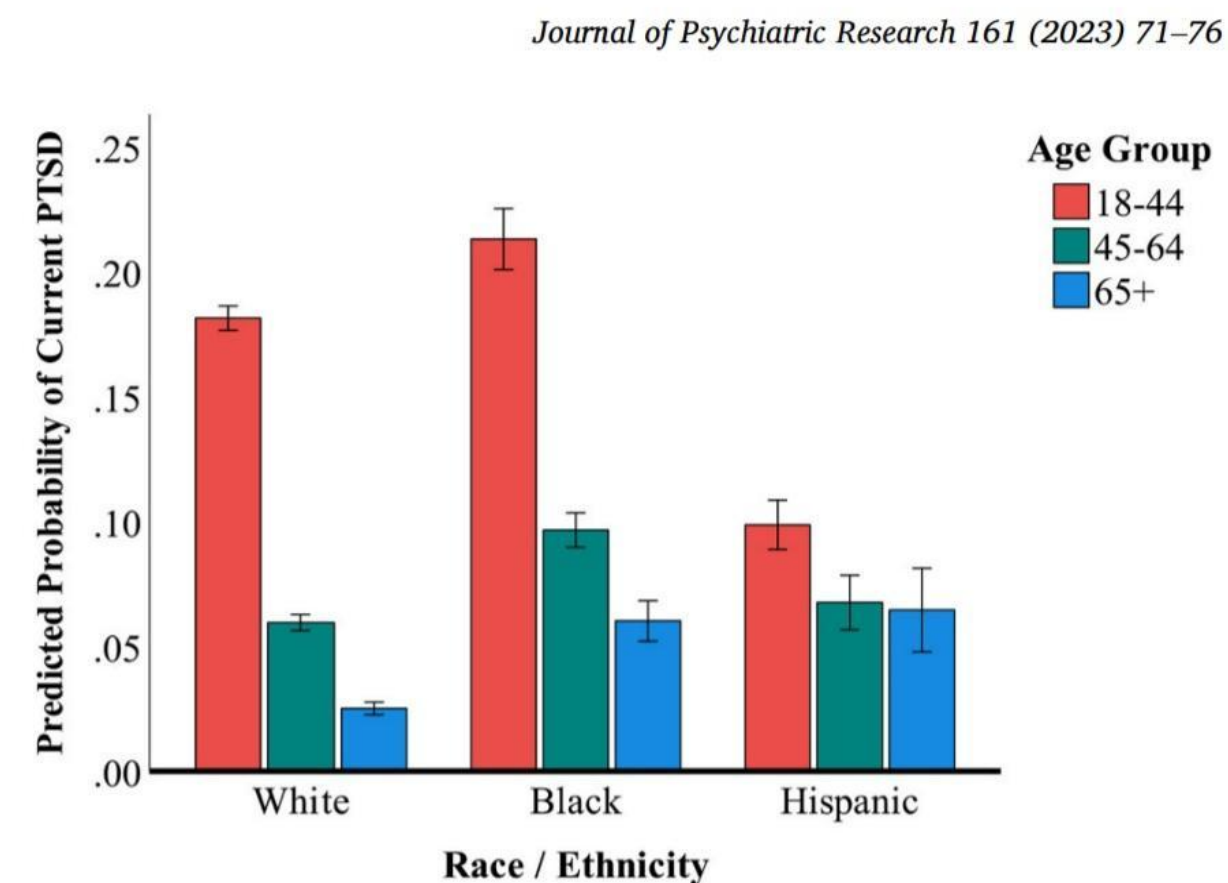
Methodology

Discrimination and PTSD: Barriers Faced by African American Veterans with PTSD research integrates both quantitative and qualitative data to show the disparities in treatment and compensation for PTSD in veterans. Secondary peer reviewed articles and information from the CDC, the National Center for PTSD, and the Veteran Affairs Organization were utilized to gather information for this project. The evidence provided focused on the variations of the prevalence of PTSD and benefits awarded across various ethnicities within the Veterans Administration. The analysis of treatment patterns and patients' overall viewpoint of their medical examiners was instrumental in finding the disparities in PTSD in veterans. The possibility of bias was not overlooked, therefore articles contrasting VA reports were taken into account. This approach was befitting where all discrepancies were considered and more recent facts were used. A limitation in this research was that not enough evidence on the correlation between homelessness and African American veterans with PTSD was provided.

Background

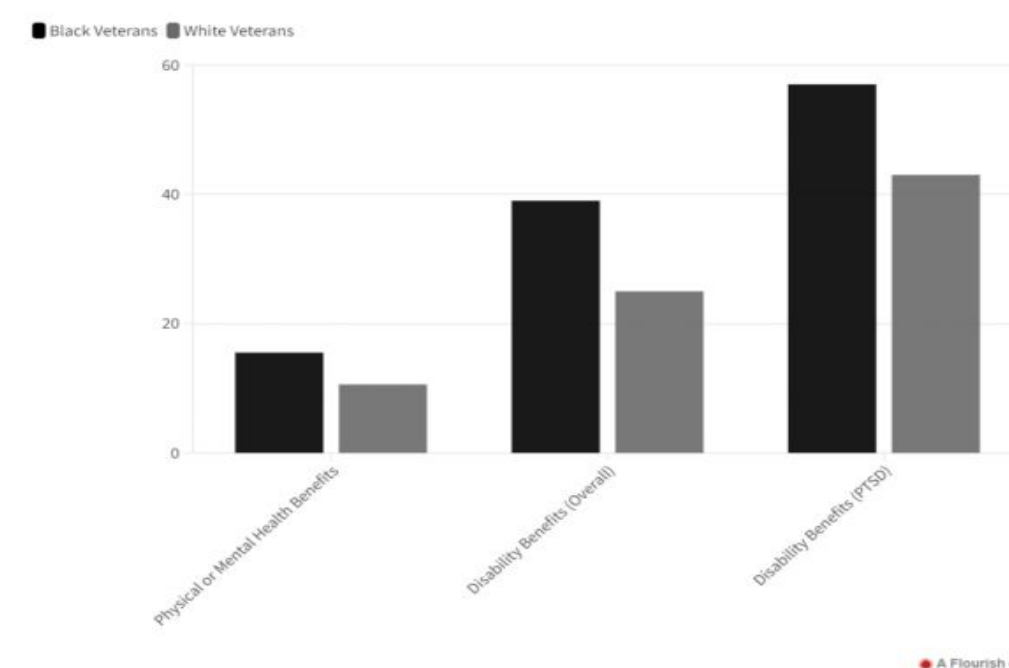
According to the National Library of Medicine, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a disorder in which a person has difficulty recovering after experiencing or witnessing a terrifying event. According to the National Center for PTSD, PTSD is more common in veterans than in civilians, specifically in veterans who have been deployed. Veterans who may be affected by PTSD are at free will to file for compensation from the VA. Dr. Keisha Edwards from Duke University stated that, "Systemic barriers and individual barriers have seen African American veterans suffer greatly from PTSD. The individual barriers include social stigma attached to PTSD, and mistrust of the healthcare system. Historic mistreatment of African Americans in healthcare created and continues to build on the mistrust of the system." Events such as the Tuskegee Syphilis Study and the works done by Dr. J. Marion Sims are examples of this. Stigma is not new in African American society and its roots can be traced back to slavery. A report from CDC reveals that White service members are more likely to report self perceived stigma than Black service members. The systemic barriers are institutionalized. In the news report from NBC News, "Black veterans were more often denied VA benefits for PTSD than white counterparts, newly surfaced Study Shows," explains that Black veterans have the lowest rates for PTSD compensation. Furthermore, according to Psychiatry Online, African American veterans had lower quality care when it comes to PTSD treatment (Rosen et al.). This disparity is attributed to structural racism prevalent in institutions. Despite being avoidable, these systemic barriers continue to greatly impact African American veterans seeking treatment for PTSD.

Data Analysis



Note. PTSD=posttraumatic stress disorder; errors bars are 95% confidence intervals.

The graph above represents the prevalence of PTSD across different races and different age groups. It reveals that PTSD is more prevalent within Black race in all age groups.



Denial rates for Black Veterans are consistently higher across submitted benefit claims. Source: United States Department of Veterans Affairs/Government Accountability Office

Data from the graph above shows the relation between denial rates for disability claims between White and Black veterans. Black veterans have the highest denial rates for all the PTSD claims.

Results

The research imparts that Black veterans experience the highest rates of denials in seeking PTSD benefits despite being more affected by PTSD. According to the article in Psychiatryonline.org entitled, "Racial Differences in Veterans Satisfaction with Examination of Disability from Posttraumatic Stress Disorder," "African American veterans are less likely to have an excellent experience with their examiners" (Rosen et al.).

African American veterans are also more likely to discontinue their treatment process and therefore fail to receive any diagnosis. According to Kaiser Family Foundation, "Black individuals have evidence of higher rates of mistrust of the healthcare system and medical officers in general." Black veterans experienced significantly higher rates of lifetime PTSD (11.0%) than White veterans 6.0%; (Smith et al., 2016). This disproportion continues to increase with the unequal treatment of African American veterans with PTSD.

Conclusion

The discrimination African American veterans with PTSD face in accessing medical care and awarding of benefits in the United States has indeed led to continued mistrust of the healthcare system. Therefore, African American veterans cannot progress if inequities persist in their institutions. The disparities in the diagnosis, treatment, and awarding of benefits for PTSD should be addressed and acted upon. African American veterans face racial inequities and this prevents them from accessing quality healthcare. The VA should make policy reforms and ensure that it is a system that favors all. This research has demonstrated that it's not playing the victim card if this is the cruel reality African American veterans have to live in. It is essential that policies are adopted to protect our dedicated African American veterans.

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