

FINDING HUMANITY

A PODCAST SHARING TRUE STORIES OF COURAGE AND PURPOSE

FINDING HUMANITY PODCAST EDUCATION TOOLKITS Season 3: Stuck in Transit

EPISODE 9

PTSD: The Hidden Costs of War | Jonathan Hancock

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Our goal is to share our insights, research, policy analysis and key findings with hopes to inspire continued engagement and learning around the podcast episodes and the substantial content and topics unearthed in each episode.

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About the Finding Humanity Podcast | Season 3: How does one get out of a vicious cycle of violence, hatred, or oppression? In Season 3 of Finding Humanity, we bring you stories of people trapped in environments where danger and trauma are hard to escape — and where often, self-identity is eradicated. In each episode, we meet humans who are stuck in transit and follow their unique journeys in search of justice and freedom. [Learn More](#)

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EPISODE INFORMATION

Main topics in Episode: Veterans & PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder)

Short Description of Episode: In 2004, Jonathan Hancock was assigned to the Second Battalion Fourth Marines, also known as the “Magnificent Bastards.” He was sent to Ramadi, then a stronghold for Saddam Hussein's followers and Al Qaeda leadership. Five years after deployment, Jonathan fell into a depression — a dark hole that he couldn't get out of — and attempted to take his own life. PTSD or post traumatic stress disorder is a mental health issue developed after experiencing or witnessing a life-threatening event like combat, a natural disaster, a car accident, or sexual assault. In the general US population alone, an estimated 6.8% will experience PTSD at any point in their lives. That number is much higher among veterans, between 13 to 30%. In this episode, we'll unpack PTSD as it relates to veterans of war. How does one move past the guilt of hurting innocent lives? Is there such a thing as 'just war'? Does traditional masculinity in the military impact the severity of PTSD symptoms? What can be done to provide more support to people impacted by war?

Quick Facts & Data

VETERANS:

- There were around 20.4 million US veterans in 2016, representing less than 10% of the total US adult population. [1]
- Gulf War-era veterans now account for the largest share of all US veterans, surpassing Vietnam-era veterans. [1]
- The share of the US population with military experience is declining. Over the past half-century, the number of people on active duty has dropped significantly, from 3.5 million in 1968, during the draft era, to 1.3 million (or less than 1% of all U.S. adults) in today's all-volunteer force. The military draft ended in 1973. [1]
- The demographic profile of veterans is expected to change in the next few decades. Currently, nine-in-ten veterans (91%) are men while 9% are women, according to the VA's 2016 population model estimates. By 2045, the share of female veterans is expected to double to 18%. The number of female veterans is

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also projected to increase, from around 1.9 million in 2016 to 2.2 million in 2045. Male veterans, on the other hand, are projected to drop by almost half, from 18.5 million in 2016 to 9.8 million in 2045. [1]

- Projections also indicate that the veteran population will become slightly younger by 2045, with 33% of veterans younger than 50 (compared with 27% in 2016), even as the overall U.S. population continues to age. The share of veterans ages 50 to 69 is expected to shrink from 39% to 33%, while the share of those 70 and older is predicted to be around a third of the total (34%) by 2045, similar to the current share. [1]
- Fewer members of Congress have prior military experience than in the past. As the share of Americans who are veterans has declined, so has the share of Congress members who have previously served in the military. [1]
- The Department of Veterans Affairs receives a low favorability rating. Roughly half of U.S. adults (49%) had a favorable view of the VA and 34% expressed an unfavorable view. As with all the agencies and departments in the survey, there were partisan differences. Republicans and Republican-leaning independents expressed lower favorability for the VA (40%) than Democrats and Democratic leaners (60%). [1]
- Americans continue to see veterans' services as an important priority. In an April survey, a majority of people (75%) said that if they were making the federal budget, they would increase spending for veterans' benefits and services – the highest share of all 14 program areas included in the survey. [1]

MENTAL HEALTH:

- In 2019, there was a vast treatment gap among U.S. veterans for substance use disorder and mental illness. [2]
- Around 85 percent of veterans with a substance use disorder reported no treatment in the past year, and 53.3 percent of those with any mental illness also reported no treatment. [2]
- From 2009 to 2019, the percentage of young adult U.S. veterans who had serious thoughts about suicide slightly decreased. [3]

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- In 2019, almost 9 percent of U.S. veterans aged 18-25 years reported serious thoughts of suicide in the past year. [3]
- In 2019, substance use was more frequent among U.S. veterans with mental illness. Around 35 percent of veterans over the age of 18 with serious mental illness reported illicit drug use in the past year. [4]
- The statistic illustrates the percentage of U.S. veterans aged 18 years and over who reported using select substances in the past year as of 2019, by mental health status. [4]

DISABILITY:

- While 65 percent of veterans rated their health as excellent before they joined the military, only 5 percent currently rated their overall health as such. [5]
- In 2019 about 1.66 million veterans had a service-connected disability rating of 70 percent or higher. [6]

[1] Facts about US veterans, Pew Research Center, [link](#)

[2] Substance use, Statista, [link](#)

[3] Suicidal thoughts, Statista, [link](#)

[4] Substance and mental illness, Statista, [link](#)

[5] Overall health, Statista, [link](#)

[6] Disability, Statista, [link](#)

Topical Background Information & Context

WAR

War is the most destructive and pitiless of all human activities. And yet the experience of war has a profound and strangely compelling effect on those who fight. Combat kills, maims, and terrifies, but it can also reveal the power of brotherhood and a selfless sense of purpose. It's an experience that changes soldiers, and those changes last a lifetime. Most who join the military and go to war are young—18, 19 years old—and many have never been away from home. They have little experience of the world, let alone war, death, and killing. For them, and for all soldiers, combat is a complex mix of emotions that define the experience of war and shape the experience of coming home.

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War is a lot of things and it is unrealistic to pretend that exciting isn't one of them. War offers soldiers raw life: vibrant, terrifying, and full blast. According to Sebastian Junger, "It is insanely exciting. It is the worst thing in the world, inflicting both physical and emotional injuries, yet the people who have been through it often miss it terribly." This exhilaration is related to the brain's physiological response to trauma and stress centered in the amygdala—the fight, flight, or freeze part of the brain—triggering adrenaline flow, pushing up pulse and blood pressure levels dramatically, and flooding the heart, brain, and major muscle groups. "There's nothing like it in the world," one Afghanistan veteran told Junger. "If it's negative 20 degrees outside, you're sweating. If it's 120, you're ice cold. It's an adrenaline rush like you can't imagine."

The capacity for self-sacrifice among human beings is nowhere more evident than in the bond between soldiers during war. Sebastian Junger calls this brotherhood the "core experience of combat... The willingness to die for another person is a form of love, and is a profound and essential part of the experience." Some combat veterans have felt that their lives never mattered more than when they were in combat. This sense of meaning and purpose grows out of protecting, and being protected by, their comrades in arms—a shared commitment to safeguard one another's lives that is non-negotiable and only deepens with time. Psychiatrist Jonathan Shay tells us that "The terror and privation of combat bonds men in a way that the word 'brother' only partly captures. Men become mothers to one another in combat."

Young soldiers in combat inevitably confront killing. They take life away from others, and in so doing breach one of the most fundamental moral values of their society, often with long-term consequences. Fighting for survival in Vietnam, Karl Marlantes often felt satisfaction when his unit killed the enemy. In later years, he felt haunted by those deaths, as do other combat veterans.

Looking back to the origins of human warfare, it's clear that conflict is deeply related to protection of home and kin, and not to killing for its own sake. Yet, however compelling the reason, killing is a difficult act with difficult consequences. Prof. Dave Grossman tells us that killing can bring immediate "survivor euphoria," in which the happiness of the survivor at

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being alive is inseparable from the death of the other person. But the soldier might then ask a troubling question: “I just killed and I am happy about it. Does that mean I like killing?”

JUST WAR?

Just war, notion that the resort to armed force (*jus ad bellum*) is justified under certain conditions; also, the notion that the use of such force (*jus in bello*) should be limited in certain ways. Just war is a Western concept.

Most scholars agree that, to be considered just, a war must meet several *jus ad bellum* requirements. The four most important conditions are: (1) the war must be declared openly by a proper sovereign authority (e.g., the governing authority of the political community in question); (2) the war must have a just cause (e.g., defense of the common good or a response to grave injustice); (3) the warring state must have just intentions (i.e., it must wage the war for justice rather than for self-interest); and (4) the aim of the war must be the establishment of a just peace. Since the end of World War II it has become customary to add three other conditions: (1) there must be a reasonable chance of success; (2) force must be used as a last resort; and (3) the expected benefits of war must outweigh its anticipated costs.

Contemporary moral debate often has centred on *jus in bello* issues—especially the question of whether the use of nuclear weapons is ever just. The Hague Convention (1899 and 1907) and the Geneva Conventions attempted to regulate conflict and the treatment of prisoners of war and civilians by imposing international standards. Three principles established by the conventions generally govern conduct during war: (1) targets should include only combatants and legitimate military and industrial complexes; (2) combatants should not use unjust methods or weapons (e.g., torture and genocide); and (3) the force used should be proportionate to the end sought.

MILITARY

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A country's military is one of its most important assets. The military works for the government. It is used to enforce domestic and foreign policies and protect its citizens. Some nations have mandatory military service.

There are several different things to consider when discussing the size of a nation's military. One of the most important is whether a person is an active military, on reserves, or part of a paramilitary. An active member is someone that works for the military full time. These servicemen may be deployed at any time. They may also live on military bases. For example, this would be someone in the Air Force or the Army in the United States.

By active military members, China comes out on top with over 2 million people in this nation's military.

There are three other nations with active militaries exceeding 1 million people. Those are India (1.395 million), the United States (1.358 million), and the Russian Federation (1.01 million). The United States has the third-highest number of active military members and the fourth-highest overall military members. The U.S. also the highest military spending of any country.

Nations with militaries exceeding 500,000 active members include:

- Democratic People's Republic of Korea: 950,000
- Pakistan: 653,000
- Republic of Korea: 599,000
- Iran: 523,000

On the other side of the coin, some nations have no active military members, or their militaries are minimal. These nations have no active members of the military:

- Costa Rica
- Iceland
- Libya
- Mauritius
- Palestine

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- Panama

In terms of reserve members, Vietnam comes out on top. This nation has about 5 million members of its reserves. The Republic of Korea also has several million members of its military reserves – 3.1 million to be more exact. Other nations with reserve militaries with at least 1 million members include:

- Republic of China: 2.8 million
- Russian Federation: 2.57 million
- India: 2.096 million
- Iran: 1.35 million
- Brazil: 1.34 million
- Cuba: 1.159 million
- Finland: 1.127 million

The nation with the largest paramilitary is the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, which has over 5.889 million members. In the United States, there are more than 2.9 million people that work for a paramilitary organization. Iran, the Russian Federation, the Republic of China, India, the People’s Republic of China, and Cuba all have paramilitary organizations that exceed 1 million members.

When looking at the total numbers, the nation with the largest military is the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, which has over 7 million members. The Russian Federation, Vietnam, the United States, and India also top the list with more than 5 million military members per country. The Democratic People’s Republic of Korea also tops the list in terms of total military members per capita and active military members per capita.

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Military Size by Country 2020

[CSV](#) [JSON](#)

Country	Active Military	Reserve Military	Paramilitary	Total Military	Total Military per
China	2,035,000	510,000	1,500,000	4,045,000	2.9
India	1,440,000	2,096,000	1,585,950	5,121,950	4
United States	1,374,699	845,000	2,918,161	5,137,860	15.6
Russia	1,013,628	2,572,500	2,310,859	5,896,987	41.5
North Korea	950,000	200,000	5,889,000	7,039,000	278.8
Pakistan	653,000			653,000	3.1
South Korea	599,000	3,100,000	900,000	4,599,000	89.9
Iran	523,000	1,350,000	2,640,000	4,513,000	55
Vietnam	482,000	5,000,000	40,000	5,522,000	57.4
Egypt	438,500	479,000	397,000	1,314,500	13.5
Myanmar	406,000		107,250	513,250	9.3
Indonesia	395,500	400,000	280,000	1,075,500	4.1
Thailand	360,850	245,000	93,700	699,550	10.2
Turkey	355,200	378,700	156,800	890,700	11
Sri Lanka	346,700	35,900	62,200	444,800	19.8
Brazil	334,500	1,340,000	395,000	2,069,500	10
Colombia	293,200	34,950	187,900	516,050	10.8
Mexico	277,150	81,500	58,900	417,550	3.4

MILITARY SPENDING GLOBALLY

The world's military spending grew by **3.6%** year-over-year (YoY)—currently the highest rate this decade—to surpass **\$1.9 trillion** in 2019.

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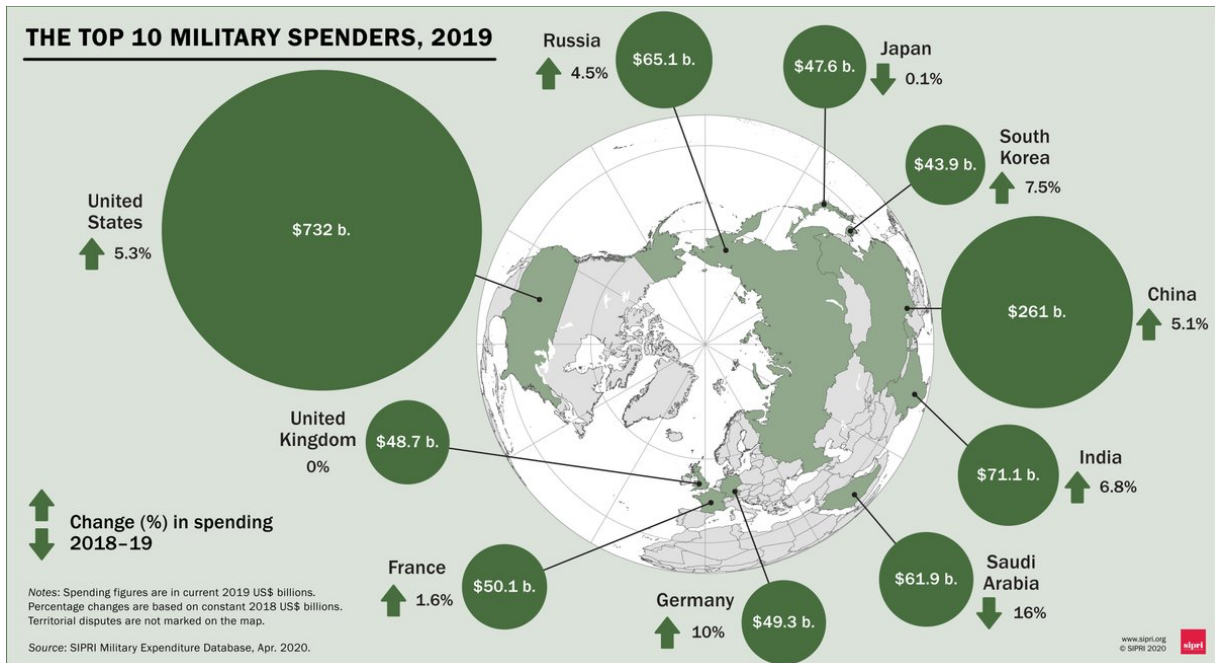


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While just 10 countries are responsible for nearly **75%** of this amount, the U.S. alone made up the lion's share with 38% of the global total. In fact, its YoY rise in spending alone of **\$49.2 billion** rivals Germany's *entire* spending for the same year.

Naturally, many questions rise about where this money goes, including the inevitable surplus of military equipment, from night vision goggles to armored vehicles, that trickles down to law enforcement around the nation.



VETERANS - THE US DEFINITION

What is a Veteran? Title 38 of the Code of Federal Regulations defines a veteran as “a person who served in the active military, naval, or air service and who was discharged or released under conditions other than dishonorable.” This definition explains that any individual that completed a service for any branch of the armed forces classifies as a veteran as long as

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they were not dishonorably discharged. However, with regard to applicable benefits, other considerations are important and will be covered in later sections.

There are a larger variety of services an individual can be a part of than is generally believed:

Full-time

Active-duty service is simply full time. Active-duty members are available for duty 24 hours per day, 7 days a week, with the exclusion of leave (vacation) or pass (authorized time off). Active-duty members fall under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Department of Defense and can serve in the Army, Air Force, Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard.

Remember:

If an individual served active-duty service, it is credible toward length-of-service requirements when qualifying for veterans benefits.

Part-Time

Performing duties one weekend per month, plus two weeks of training per year, members of the Reserves and National Guard are considered part-time, though, since the Gulf War in 1990, they've spent exponentially more time called to full-time active duties. In fact, National Guards and Reserves generally spend two years of their six-year enlistment performing full-time active duty.

Reserves

The objective of the Reserves is to deliver supplementary support to active-duty forces, when obligated. All of the different military services have a Reserve branch under the patronage of the Department of Defense: Army Reserve, Air Force Reserve, Navy Reserve, Marine Corps Reserve, and Coast Guard Reserve. Though it doesn't count as active-duty time for most veteran's benefits, when an individual joins the Reserves, they attend basic training and military job school full time. After completion of basic training and military job school, those considered Reserves resume civilian life, except for training called inactive duty training (IDT) which takes place one weekend per month. Reserves, however, do complete 14 days of full-time training once a year. The training is categorized as active duty for training (ADT). Neither IDT nor ADT counts toward service requirements for veteran's benefits. The president and secretary of defense can request those in the Reserves to active duty at any

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time in order to increase efforts on certain military projects. Approximately 65,000 Reserves are performing active duty in support of military contingency operations at any given moment. This type of active duty counts toward veterans benefits.

National Guard

The principal difference between the National Guard and the Reserves is that the federal government is in charge of the Reserves, while the National Guard units predominately belong to individual states. There are two National Guard types: the Army National Guard and the Air National Guard. National Guard members attend basic training and military job school full time under ADT (active duty for training), similar to the Reserves. They resume daily civilian life but train one weekend per month (IDT) in addition to 15 full-time training days per year. This type of IDT/ADT time doesn't count toward veteran's benefits. State governors can call National Guard members to active duty if a state emergency arises. Such emergencies include relief or protection of property and people outside the authority of local law enforcement. This form of state duty is known officially as "Title 38 Call-up" and doesn't count toward veteran's benefits either. Like the Reserves, the president and secretary of defense can call upon the National Guard in provision of military contingency operations, known as "Title 10 Call-ups" or federal duty. This type of duty counts toward service requirements for veteran's benefits. In a given month, an estimated 40,000 members of the Air and Army National Guard are performing federal duty overseas.

Active Guard/Reserves

A program called the Active Guard/Reserves (AGR) includes members of the Reserves and National Guard that take part in full-time active duty. To make sure that National Guard and Reserve units are ready to mobilize at all times, AGR members provide daily operational support. For veteran's benefit service requirements, AGR duty is similar to full-time active-duty service.

Individual Ready Reserve A military service contract spans a minimum of eight years total and the time that isn't spent on active duty or in the Guard/Reserves must be spent in inactive reserves, known as the

Individual Ready Reserves (IRR).

Generally, after serving four years, a member is transferred to the IRR for their remaining four years. IRR members don't take part in weekend drills or annual training, but

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unfortunately, they don't get paid either. IRR members can be recalled into active duty when necessary, in order to support military projects. During IRR status, the time spent inactive doesn't count toward veteran's benefits unless the member is recalled into active duty. Roughly 15,000 IRR members have been recalled to active duty, largely for the Army and Marine Corps, every year since 2004.

VETERANS AND PTSD

PTSD impact on war veterans - those who cannot escape the triggers and traumas on war - impact of war on society and people - statistics on veterans that need mental health services, suicide rates, support services - look at US specifically - military spending - worldwide budgets to military spending and support to veterans - number of veterans and troops - how many active wars since WW1 and trends - military industrial complex and war and impact on people fighting - number of wounded veterans - just war theory (being there for a benevolent cause - humanising and targeting local population) - idea of demilitarising violence from warfare.

WHAT IS PTSD

PTSD (posttraumatic stress disorder) is a mental health problem that some people develop after experiencing or witnessing a life-threatening event, like combat, a natural disaster, a car accident, or sexual assault. If it's been longer than a few months and you're still having symptoms, you may have PTSD. For some people, PTSD symptoms may start later, or they may come and go over time.

Anyone can develop PTSD at any age. A number of factors can increase the chance that someone will have PTSD, many of which are not under that person's control. For example, having a very intense or long-lasting traumatic event or getting injured during the event can make it more likely that a person will develop PTSD. PTSD is also more common after certain types of trauma, like combat and sexual assault.

Personal factors, like previous traumatic exposure, age, and gender, can affect whether or not a person will develop PTSD. What happens after the traumatic event is also important. Stress can make PTSD more likely, while social support can make it less likely.

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PTSD symptoms usually start soon after the traumatic event, but they may not appear until months or years later. They also may come and go over many years. If the symptoms last longer than four weeks, cause you great distress, or interfere with your work or home life, you might have PTSD.

There are four types of PTSD symptoms, but they may not be exactly the same for everyone. Each person experiences symptoms in their own way.

- Reliving the event (also called re-experiencing symptoms). Memories of the traumatic event can come back at any time. You may feel the same fear and horror you did when the event took place.
- Avoiding situations that remind you of the event. You may try to avoid situations or people that trigger memories of the traumatic event. You may even avoid talking or thinking about the event.
- Negative changes in beliefs and feelings. The way you think about yourself and others changes because of the trauma.
- Feeling keyed up (also called hyperarousal). You may be jittery, or always alert and on the lookout for danger. You might suddenly become angry or irritable. This is known as hyperarousal.

MORAL INJURY

Moral injury is the damage done to one's conscience or moral compass when that person perpetrates, witnesses, or fails to prevent acts that transgress one's own moral beliefs, values, or ethical codes of conduct. While the concept itself is not new—throughout history philosophers, poets, and warriors themselves have long wrestled with the ethical dilemmas inherent in war—the term “moral injury” is more recent, and is thought to have originated in the writings of Vietnam War veteran and peace activist Camillo “Mac” Bica (Brock & Lettini, 2012; Bica, 1999, 2014), and Jonathan Shay (Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character, 1994) as the aftermath of warzone trauma.

Returning veterans, and those who care for them, are struggling to understand and respond effectively when experiences of war result in levels of anguish, anger, and alienation not well

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explained in terms of mental health diagnoses such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD.)

Drescher et al. (2011) define moral injury as “disruption in an individual’s confidence and expectations about one’s own or others’ motivation or capacity to behave in a just and ethical manner” (p. 9). Litz et al. (2009) further describe moral injury as “the inability to contextualize or justify personal actions or the actions of others and the unsuccessful accommodation of these . . . experiences into pre-existing moral schemas” (p. 705). Shay (2014) emphasizes leadership failure and a “betrayal of what’s right, by a person who holds legitimate authority in a high stakes situation.” Silver (2011) speaks of, “a deep soul wound that pierces a person’s identity, sense of morality, and relationship to society” (para. 6).

Examples of moral injury in war:

- Using deadly force in combat and causing the harm or death of civilians, knowingly but without alternatives, or accidentally
- Giving orders in combat that result in the injury or death of a fellow service member
- Failing to provide medical aid to an injured civilian or service member
- Returning home from deployment and hearing of the executions of cooperating local nationals
- Failing to report knowledge of a sexual assault or rape committed against oneself, a fellow service member, or civilians
- Following orders that were illegal, immoral, and/or against the Rules of Engagement (ROE) or Geneva Convention
- A change in belief about the necessity or justification for war, during or after one’s service
- Moral injury can lead to serious distress, depression, and suicidality. Moral injury can take the life of those suffering from it, both metaphorically and literally. Moral injury debilitates people, preventing them from living full and healthy lives.

Within the context of military service, particularly regarding the experience of war, “moral injury” refers to the lasting emotional, psychological, social, behavioral, and spiritual impacts

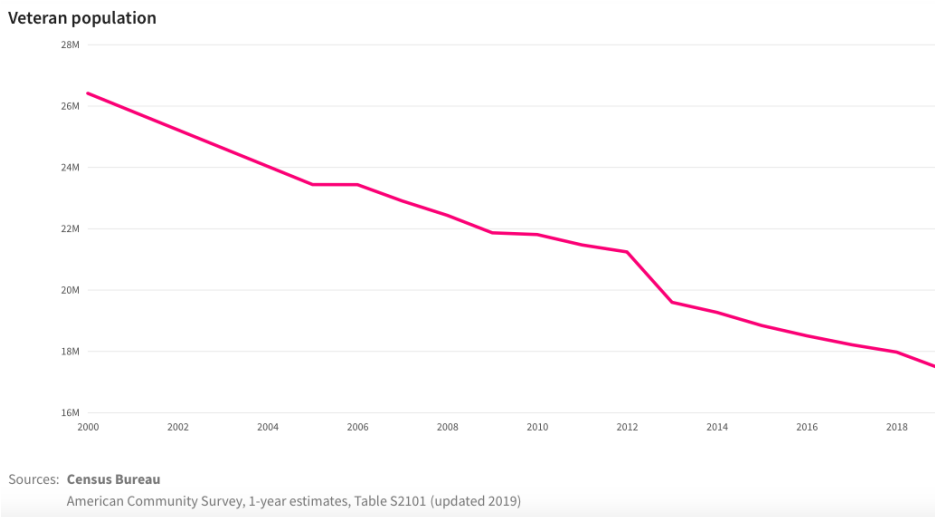
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of actions that violate a service member's core moral values and behavioral expectations of self or others (Litz et al., 2009).

VETERANS IN THE US

According to the US Census, 6.9% of the adult population, or 17.4 million people, identified as veterans in 2019. With the overall size of the military declining and older veterans passing away, the number of people identifying as veterans has steadily declined for two decades.



In 2019, 9.4% of veterans were women, compared with 6% in 2000. The share of veterans who served during the Vietnam War, Korean War or World War II was 44.4% in 2019. The share of veterans who served after the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks was 21.7% More than half of veterans today are over 65 years old, nearly 81.4% of veterans are white.

According to the Census, there were over nine million employed veterans in 2019, with the largest group of veterans — 22% — working in government. They also often find work in manufacturing (12% of veterans are in that industry), and professional and business services (11% of veterans), which includes jobs such as those in consulting, management, and accounting. Younger veterans are even more likely than older veterans to work in government, whereas older veterans are more likely to be self-employed.

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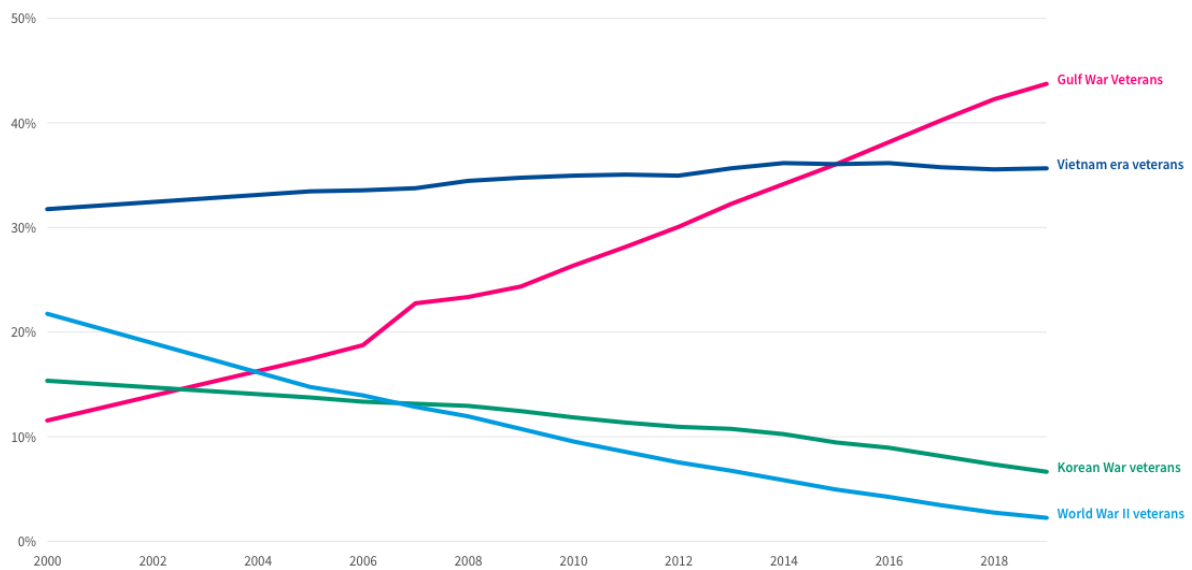


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Percent of veterans by period of service



Sources: [Census Bureau](#). [see more](#) ▾

Veterans also earn more on average than non-veterans. The median 2019 income for veterans was \$44,241, while the median income of adult civilians was \$35,977. The veteran poverty was 6.7% in 2019, the same as in 2000, and 29.9% of veterans have disabilities.

Fewer veterans face homelessness now than in years past, according to Point in Time counts. In 2018, the VA estimated that there were 38,000 homeless veterans, down almost 50% from the 2001 estimate of 65,000.

The government spent nearly \$200 billion in 2018 on the Department of Veterans Affairs, accounting for 5% of all federal spending. Most of that spending funds veterans' compensation, pension benefits, and medical care.

In 2018, the VA spent \$71 billion on veteran medical care, serving more than 6 million patients. Spending per patient varies significantly across the priority group of veterans, which gives urgency

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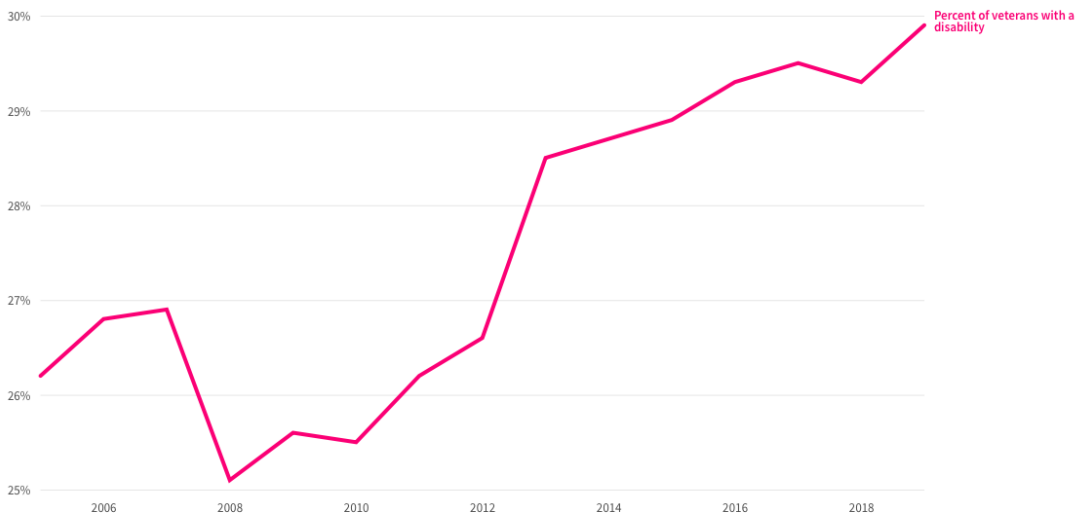
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to patients based on the severity of their disability or medical condition, and whether the condition is related to their service.

More than four million veterans used the disability compensation program in 2016, making it the VA's most-accessed program. The number of veterans taking advantage of education benefits was just over one million in 2016, almost double the veterans using the benefit in 2008.

With each passing year since 2000, the US has fewer and fewer veterans. Veterans are seeing improvements in quality of life, including lower unemployment rates. Conversely, increased poverty and disability rates mean their situation is worsening in other ways. Even with a shrinking veteran population, government spending on veterans is up, with a growing amount of funding going to disability compensation and medical care.

Percent of veterans with a disability



Sources: [Census Bureau](#). [see more](#) ▾

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VETERAN SUICIDE

The rate of suicide among veterans ticked upwards in recent years despite increased public attention and funding on the problem, according to a new report released by Department of Veterans Affairs officials on Thursday.

However, the latest data still lags two years behind present conditions and does not include any figures from the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, which mental health experts have warned may be causing even larger increases in the rates of mental distress and self harm among veterans.

The suicide report — which is typically released in early October, but was delayed more than a month this year — shows the rate of suicide among veterans at 17.6 a day in 2018. That's a slight increase from 2017, when the number was 17.5.

Numerous public figures and public awareness campaigns in recent years have quoted the figure of “20 a day” in reference to veterans suicide, but VA officials last year clarified that estimate also includes active-duty troops, guardsmen and reservists.

From 2005 to 2018, the overall suicide rate has remained largely unchanged, between 17 and 18 veterans a day. That's in spite of numerous public awareness campaigns, VA outreach programs and new department training mandates enacted over the last two presidential administrations.

After making adjustments for sex and age, veterans suicide was roughly 27.5 per 100,000 individuals in 2018, up from 25.8 per 100,000 in 2016. By comparison, among all U.S. adults, the suicide rate per 100,000 was 18.3.

In a statement, VA Secretary Robert Wilkie said that despite the lack of overall progress in suicide prevention among veterans, the report does show some areas of improvement.

“The data shows the rate of suicide among veterans who recently used VA health services has decreased, an encouraging sign as the department continues its work and shares what we learn with those who care for and about veterans,” he said.

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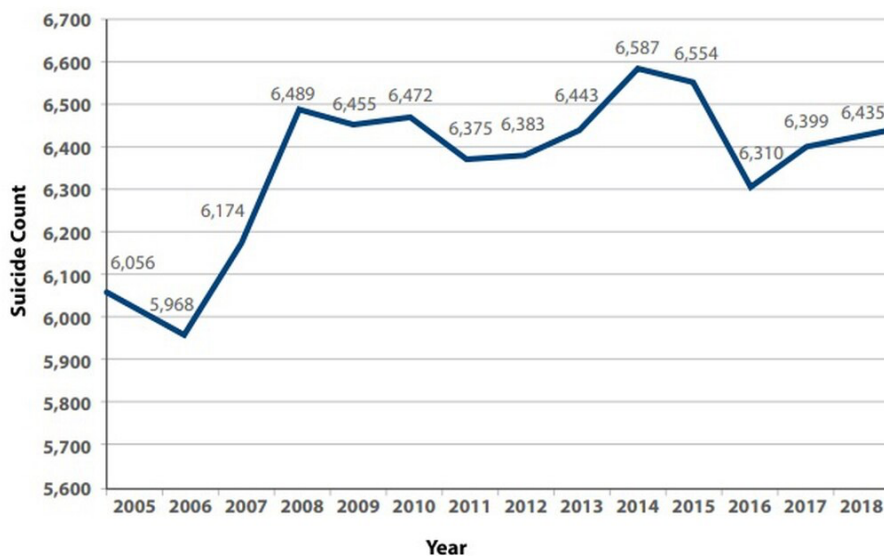
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The rate of suicide among veterans who recently received some type of VA care decreased was down 2.4 percent from 2017 to 2018. For veterans with no connection to VA care, it increased 2.5 percent.

“This report offers data points that suicide is indeed preventable through clinically based and community-based prevention efforts and interventions, as well as through research and surveillance within and beyond the VA,” the report authors wrote.

VETERAN SUICIDE PREVENTION ANNUAL REPORT | NOVEMBER 2020

Graph 2. Number of Veteran Suicides, 2005–2018



MILITARY SERVICE AND MASCULINITY

For members of the military, being able to suppress emotions and rely on yourself can be an asset, if not a life-saving quality. But those traditionally "masculine" traits can exacerbate post-traumatic stress disorder that's especially difficult to treat, according to a robust new study in the journal *Psychology of Men and Masculinities*. For the study, researchers looked

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at 17 studies including more than 3,500 military veterans to see how traits like self-reliance affected their mental health after experiencing trauma. They found that the more veterans believed they should be tough and appear unemotional, the more likely they were to develop PTSD, have severe PTSD symptoms, and avoid seeking mental health treatment for those symptoms.

"Previous research has found that military personnel report high levels of conformity to traditional masculine norms, such as emotional control, self-reliance and the importance of one's job," lead author Elizabeth Neilson of Morehead University said in a press release. "These values can promote self-confidence and skill-building in the field, but when a service member is confronted with physical or mental trauma, they can also contribute to more severe PTSD."

The research also noted that after experiencing trauma like combat or sexual abuse, many veterans took their masculine traits to an even greater extreme, presumably in an effort to counter the very non-traditionally masculine feelings of powerlessness and hopelessness that traumatic experiences can bring on. The general findings are troubling because these very traits that seem to aggravate PTSD symptoms also make people with them less likely to seek mental health treatment. And, even those who do seek treatment may struggle to recover since most effective treatments require them to talk about their emotions.

TOXIC MASCULINITY

In 2018, the American Psychological Association published voluntary guidelines suggesting therapists consider talking about how society's idea of manliness may affect them. For example, the guidelines encourage doctors to talk to men about healthy family relationships, to support talk therapy for boys and men, and to suggest healthy behaviors like seeking preventive healthcare and eating well — things which, generally, come more naturally to women. The guidelines were controversial because some saw it as an attack on men and how they see themselves, and not a productive solution to men's higher levels of anxiety and depression, suicide, and overdoses.

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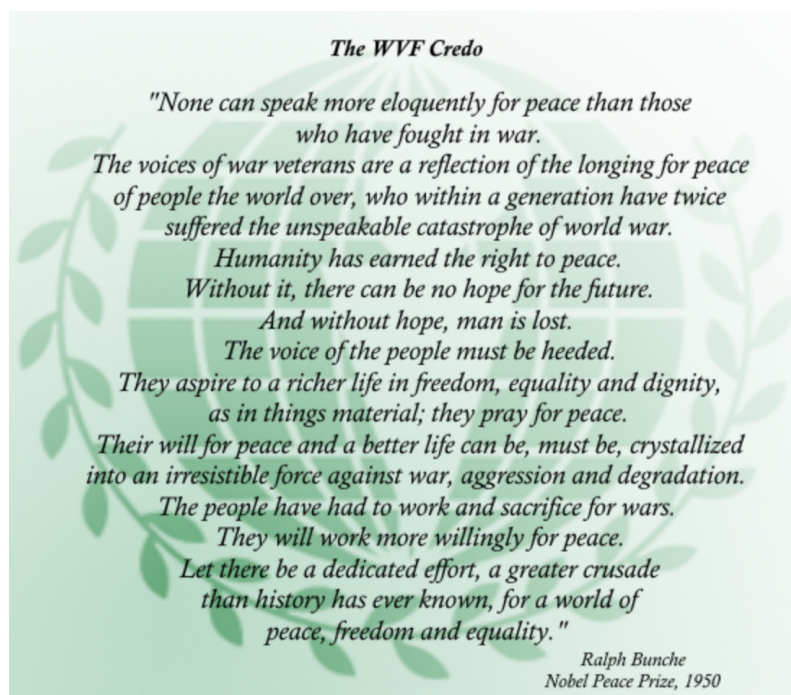
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The latest research, however, underscores that some traditionally masculine traits can indeed be harmful, and other recent research has shown that it's not just veterans who are affected.

WORLD VETERANS FEDERATION

The World Veterans Federation is the world's largest international veteran organisation. The federation consists of 172 veterans organization from 121 countries. It maintains a consultative status with the UN since 1951 and was conferred the title of "Peace Messenger".



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Just war, Britannica, [link](#)
PTSD FAQ, Military, [link](#)
Moral Injury, Syracuse uni, [link](#)
FAQ, VOA, [link](#)
Moral Injury, VOA, [link](#)
Moral injuries, SA, [link](#)
World Veterans Federation, [link](#)
Veterans, US Facts, [link](#)
Suicide, Military times, [link](#)
Demilitarization and Disarmament, Study war no more, [link](#)
Masculinity and PTSD, Insider, [link](#)

Proposed Discussion Questions

- What do you think about the “just war” concept? Can a war ever *really* be just?
- Is demilitarization possible? If so, how can we go about starting a global movement for disarmament?
- What alternative security arrangements can be pursued to a more disarmed world?
- How are veterans perceived in your country?
- What should be done about the physical and mental costs of traumas experienced in war in order to sufficiently and effectively help veterans?
- What can we do to better equip people to handle the mental turmoil of war? Is that even possible?

Additional Reading & Follow up

Learn more about:

Jonathan Hancock:

- The Road to Recovery with War Veteran, Greenwich, [link](#)
- Interview, CNN, [link](#)

Elisabeth Nelison:

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- Bio, Morehead State, [link](#)
- Article on masculinity Ideology, [link](#)

How to help veterans:

- World Veterans Federation, [link](#)
- List of Veteran Support Organizations, [link](#)

Peace education:

- Study War No More, [link](#)
- World Beyond War, [link](#)
- Global Campaign for Peace Education, [link](#)

PODCAST PRODUCTION ORGANIZATIONS & TEAM

Humanity Lab Foundation is a disruptive empathy-driven movement at the intersection of public policy and people power. As a collective of enablers, the Humanity Lab facilitates public engagement and social innovation to drive progress on human development and create an equitable and just world. Through a diverse portfolio of programs and initiatives, the Humanity Lab enhances global development systems by convening, connecting and collaborating with everyday people to solve complex challenges and drive social change. The Humanity Lab aims to: unlock human potential, break down barriers, provoke thought-leadership and knowledge sharing, facilitate partnerships, catalyze action, and democratize access to the power that shapes the world. The Humanity Lab has collaborated with a large array of partners including the Office of the President of the United Nations General Assembly, United Nations Office of Partnerships, United Nations, Qualcomm, The Elders, Warner Music, MTV and the Washington Diplomat.

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