

# Study finds some Vietnam vets currently have PTSD 40 years after war ended

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While it has been 40 years since the Vietnam War ended, about 271,000 veterans who served in the war zone are estimated to have current full posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) plus subthreshold (meeting some diagnostic criteria) war-zone PTSD and more than one-third have current major depressive disorder, according to an article published online by *JAMA Psychiatry*.

The study by Charles R. Marmar, M.D., of the New York University Langone Medical Center, and colleagues builds on the National Vietnam Veterans Readjustment Study (NVVRS), which was implemented from 1984 through 1988 (about 10 years after the war ended). The authors' National Vietnam Veterans Longitudinal Study (NVVLS) is the first follow-up to NVVRS. There were 1,839 veterans from the original study still living at the time of the NVVLS from July 2012 to May 2013 and 78.8 percent (n=1,450) of the veterans participated in at least one phase of the study.

The authors estimate a prevalence among male [war zone](#) veterans of 4.5 percent for a current PTSD diagnosis based on the Clinician-Administered PTSD Scale for DSM-5; 10.8 percent based on that assessment plus subthreshold PTSD; and 11.2 percent based on the PTSD Checklist for DSM-5 items for current war-zone PTSD. Among female veterans, the estimates were 6.1 percent, 8.7 percent and 6.6 percent, respectively.

The study also found coexisting major depression in 36.7 percent of veterans with current war-zone PTSD.

About 16 percent of war zone Vietnam veterans reported an increase of more than 20 points on a PTSD symptom scale while 7.6 percent reported a decrease of greater than 20 points on the symptom scale. "An important minority of Vietnam veterans are symptomatic after four decades, with more

than twice as many deteriorating as improving," the study notes.

The authors conclude: "Policy implications include the need for greater access to evidence-based mental health services; the importance of integrating mental health treatment into primary care in light of the nearly 20 percent mortality; attention to the stresses of aging, including retirement, chronic illness, declining social support and cognitive changes that create difficulties with the management of unwanted memories; and anticipating challenges that lie ahead for Iraq and Afghanistan [veterans](#)," the study concludes.

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