

# Conceptualizations of Recovery among Vietnam Era Veterans with PTSD

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# Disclosure

- I have no commercial relationships to disclose.

# Project

- Funding
  - VISN 5 MIRECC Pilot
- Research Team
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# Specific Aims

- To identify Vietnam era veterans' conceptions of treatment and recovery in PTSD, including goals, expectations, and beliefs
  - To explore if and how these veterans' conceptions of treatment and recovery in PTSD change over time
- To gain an understanding of Vietnam era veterans' perceived history of treatment in the VA, and how this perceived history shapes current conceptions of recovery
- To demonstrate the feasibility and acceptability of interviewing Vietnam era veterans about their beliefs and experiences about treatment and recovery in PTSD

# Background and Significance

- High overall dropout rates for PTSD treatment (38%)<sup>1</sup>
- PTSD is 4<sup>th</sup> most prevalent diagnosis among Vietnam era veterans using VHA services (18%)<sup>2</sup>
  - Hypertension (30.59%), Diabetes (28.09%), Arthritis (19.98%)
- Associated with poorer functional status and quality of life<sup>3,4</sup>
- Scant research focuses on Vietnam era veterans
  - Some evidence of differences in treatment engagement and response<sup>5</sup>

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2. Veterans Health Administration. (2015). *Post-Deployment Surveillance Report* (Vol. 1, No. 1). Washington, DC: Author.

3. Schnurr, P. P., Hayes, A. F., Lunney, C. A., McFall, M., & Uddo, M. (2006). Longitudinal analysis of the relationship between symptoms and quality of life in veterans treated for posttraumatic stress disorder. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 74*, 707-713.

4. Zatzick, D. F., Marmar, C. R., Weiss, D. S., Browner, W. S., Metzler, T. J., Golding, J. M., Stewart, A., Schlenger, W. E., & Wells, K. B. (1997). Posttraumatic stress disorder and functioning and quality of life outcomes in a nationally representative sample of male Vietnam veterans. *American Journal of Psychiatry, 154*, 1690-1695.

5. Chard, K. M., Schumm, J. A., Owens, G. P., & Cottingham, S. M. (2010). A comparison of OEF and OIF veterans and Vietnam veterans receiving cognitive processing therapy. *Journal of Traumatic Stress, 23*, 52-32.

# Methods

- Ethnographic Interviews
  - Open-ended questions
  - Participant as expert
- Two-interview series
  - TPI at start of involvement with Trauma Recovery Program
  - TP2 approximately 4 months after TPI

# Recruitment

- Eligibility
  - VHA definition for Vietnam service era
  - Seeking treatment
- Trauma Recovery Program (TRP)
  - Weekly orientation group meeting
  - Screened November 2016 – August 2017
- 40 Vietnam era Veterans screened
  - 14 eligible
  - 26 ineligible

# Final Sample

- 12 Vietnam era veterans
  - 9 African American, 3 Caucasian
- 23 total interviews
  - 12 TPI interviews
  - 11 TP2 interviews
- Diagnostic status
  - 7 came to TRP with current PTSD dx
  - 5 referred to further assessment
    - 2 met dx criteria
    - 3 subclinical
- 7 had prior treatment experiences



# Analysis

- Code list developed inductively through transcript review
  - Refined over several TP1 and TP2 transcripts
  - 33 codes, 7 sub-codes
- Team-based coding approach



*Findings*

# Conceptualizations of Recovery

- What would recovery look like for you?
  - *Regaining control of my life.* –Orlando, TP1
  - *I just want to live again. [...] I know how to be a soldier. I know how to be a Marine. I need to be a person.* –Elliot, TP1
  - *Being a grandfather, being a great grandfather, laying back with my grandkids and great grandkids, being able to love them.* –Lawrence, TP2
  - *I could be myself. [...] I'll be able to enjoy things sometimes with people rather than feeling bad.* –Wesley, TP1

# Recovery is Management

- *[Treatment] hasn't helped me overcome but it's helped me to control and I feel good about that. Even though I haven't overcome my trauma, I feel like I can manage it a little bit better. –Orlando, TP2*
- *I look at moving forward and what I have to do is I have to manage, I have to cope and by managing and coping, I master it. I don't let it master me. – Travis, TP2*
- *Recovery means to me where I can manage it. [...] I can manage situations when I get thoughts and triggers. –Isaac, TP2*

# “I need it to be there”

- *I carry it around. [...] So it's always gonna be there. No matter how much, how many doctors, no matter how many psychiatrists or whatever we see, it's gonna be there. And I feel like, some guys, you need it to be there. I need it to be there, because of my friends that laid their lives down to the ultimate. I need it to be there for them. I'd like for it to get better, easier to handle. –Edwin, TP2*
- *All I want and all I don't want is to put the war to rest. [...] When it's at its worst and I'm at my most fear, I hear the dudes I was fighting with tell me don't give up, man you can't let us down. How do I put the war to rest without putting them to rest? –Lawrence, TP2*

# “I owe it to them not to go out”

- *I'm not going in a grave, I'm not going out like that. [...] Too many of my brothers went out in the war. They're up on The Wall in DC and I owe it to them not to go out. They fought. –Travis, TPI*

# Recovery is a Process

## Recovery is Lifelong

- *So, I look at it and I say well you know recovery is still, this is early to me because there's no way I feel like what I've been carrying for 40-something years can be resolved in five. I would like to think it could be, but that's just not realistic to me... it's going to take maybe the rest of my life. –Orlando, TP2*
- *I will be dealing with this until I am in that little box [coffin]. –Wesley, TP2*

# Recovery is a Process

## One Day at a Time

- *...you aren't going to go from point A to point B, okay? You're gonna be somewhere in the middle and you still have the potential to revert back to point A, depending on the day, the circumstances, and what's going on. – Jason, TP2*
- *Sometimes it seems like I'm managing it and other times it seems like its very much still managing me. –Orlando, TP2*



# Recovery is a Process

## Value of Incremental Improvements

- *Although I won't be 100% recovery, but just 2% recovery, that's better than zero. If it's 20%, that's better than 10. [...] Whatever I get is better than what I had before I started this program. –Russell, TP1*
- *To me it's an incremental thing that's gonna take an awful lot of time. And I think what we've done so far is moved the point along the spectrum, and I'm very happy with that. –Jason, TP2*
- *It's like taking down that wall. I'm taking it down one brick at a time. –Elliot, TP2*

# Treatment as a Necessity

- *I'm probably gonna be in groups the rest of my life. [...] At least one a week because recovery is ongoing. –Travis, TP2*
- *I find treatment is the necessary thing for me to keep fighting to be that person I want to be. [...] It's my hope, it's a beacon, it's the light that I see. Without that, I don't see any hope. –Orlando, TP1*
- *Groups for me are something to hold on to. –Russell, TP2*

# Full Recovery Doesn't Exist

- *I know that it's always gonna be there. –Jerome, TP1*
- *Now, I don't think I'll ever be able to get over none of what's happened to me, but I can change the way that I feel about things. I can find out what triggers things. I can find out about how to stay away or how to cope with some of the thoughts and actions that I have. –Vernon, TP2*
- *The more I understand about PTSD, the less I believe in recovery. –Russell, TP2*

Questions?

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