

# **De-Cruit Group Work**

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# Trauma & Military Veterans





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# INTRODUCTION

## What's PTSD for Military veterans?

The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) explains that PTSD is “a disorder that develops in some people who have experienced a shocking, scary, or dangerous event.” In the case of military personnel specifically, these types of events typically occur during times of war when soldiers find themselves face-to-face with not only their own mortality, but that of their fellow comrades as well.

## How Common is PTSD in Veterans?

When you are in the military, you may see combat. You may have been on missions that exposed you to horrible and life-threatening experiences. These types of events can lead to PTSD. The number of Veterans with PTSD varies by service era:

- Operations Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Enduring Freedom (OEF): About 11-20 out of every 100 Veterans (or between 11-20%) who served in OIF or OEF have PTSD in a given year.
- Gulf War (Desert Storm): About 12 out of every 100 Gulf War Veterans (or 12%) have PTSD in a given year.
- Vietnam War: About 15 out of every 100 Vietnam Veterans (or 15%) were currently diagnosed with PTSD at the time of the most recent study in the late 1980s, the National Vietnam Veterans Readjustment Study (NVVRS). It is estimated that about 30 out of every 100 (or 30%) of Vietnam Veterans have had PTSD in their lifetime.

Other factors in a combat situation can add more stress to an already stressful situation. This may contribute to PTSD and other mental health problems. These factors include what you do in the war, the politics around the war, where the war is fought, and the type of enemy you face.

Reference: Veteran Affair

[https://www.ptsd.va.gov/understand/common/common\\_veterans.asp](https://www.ptsd.va.gov/understand/common/common_veterans.asp)



# WHAT ARE Veterans with PTSD Suffering From...

## Sleep Problems in Veterans with PTSD

Almost everyone with PTSD reports sleep problems. In fact, trouble sleeping is the main reason that people first go to a doctor to get help for PTSD. Both insomnia—trouble falling or staying asleep—and nightmares are PTSD symptoms. The good news is there are evidence-based treatments that can help with PTSD and sleep problems. And, these treatments help whether your sleep problems began before a traumatic event or only came about after the trauma.

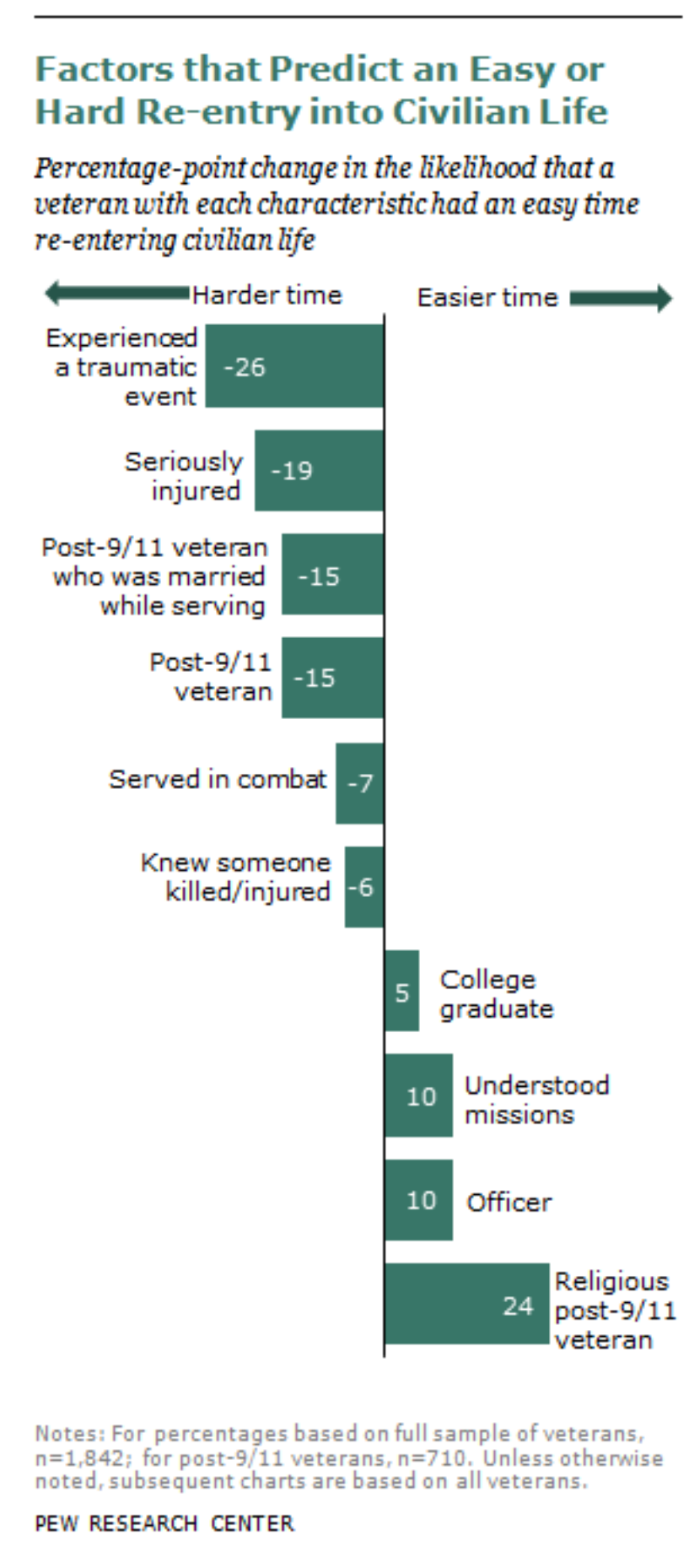
### - Insomnia Philip Gehrman, PhD

Insomnia is reported to occur in 90-100% of Vietnam era Veterans with PTSD (2,3). Insomnia was also the most commonly reported PTSD symptom in a survey of Veterans from Afghanistan and Iraq (OEF/OIF) (4). In the Millennium Cohort Study, 92% of active duty personnel with PTSD, compared to 28% of those without PTSD, reported clinically significant levels of insomnia (5).

It has been argued that sleep problems, rather than being just symptoms of PTSD, are a hallmark of the disorder (6). In support of this viewpoint, insomnia occurring in the acute aftermath of a traumatic event is a significant risk factor for the later development of PTSD in civilian (7,8) and active duty (9) populations.

### -What Is the Best Treatment for Sleep Problems?

The best treatment for insomnia is Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Insomnia, or CBT-I. This talk therapy is recommended over medication because it is more effective—CBT-I has been shown to work in multiple research studies—and has fewer side effects than medication. CBT-I improves sleep in 7 out of 10 people who complete it. Research also shows that CBT-I reduces how many nightmares people have and the distress related to upsetting dreams.



## Disillusionment from Civilian Life

### The Difficult Transition from Military to Civilian Life

“Why do some veterans have a hard time readjusting to civilian life while others make the transition with little or no difficulty? To answer that question, Pew researchers analyzed the attitudes, experiences and demographic characteristics of veterans to identify the factors that independently predict whether a service member will have an easy or difficult re-entry experience.”

### Common Challenges During Re-adjustment to Civilian Life

Veterans may find difficulty:

- Relating to people who do not know or understand what military personnel have experienced (and many civilians don't know that they don't know!).
- Reconnecting with family and re-establishing a role in the family. Families may have created new routines during absences and both the family and the Veteran will have to adjust to changes.
- Joining or creating a community. When moving to a new base or post, the military helps military personnel and families adjust. This structure is often not automatically in place when someone separates from the military. The Veteran and his or her family may have to find new ways to join or create a social community.
- Preparing to enter the work force. In applying for a job, a Veteran will have to determine how to translate his or her military skills and duties into civilian terms and create a resume. A Veteran may have never created a resume. Instead of a resume the military.
- Returning to a job. For some recently returning Service Members, they may find themselves behind a desk in as little as 3 days after leaving a combat zone. Returning to the job may include a period of catching up, learning new skills, or adjusting to a new position. It will also include adjusting to social changes that may have occurred in the workplace. During the transition back to work, some Veterans also experience worry and fear about possible job loss.





## Common Challenges During Re-adjustment to Civilian Life

- Creating structure.  
The military provides structure and has a clear chain of command. This does not naturally exist outside the military. A Veteran will have to create his or her own structure or adjust to living in an environment with more ambiguity.
- Adjusting to providing basic necessities (e.g., food, clothing, housing).  
In the military, these things are not only provided, but there is often little choice (e.g., you eat at determined times in a certain place, duty station determines your dress). Given the lack of choices while in the military, the vast array of choices in the civilian world can sometimes be overwhelming.
- Adjusting to a different pace of life and work.  
Civilian workplaces may be competitive environments, as opposed to the collaborative camaraderie of the military. Given the direct nature of communication in military settings, there may be subtle nuances in conversations and workplace lingo that are unfamiliar to Veterans.
- Establishing services.  
A Veteran may have to learn how to get a doctor, dentist, life insurance, etc. These services were previously provided by the military. A Veteran may also need to navigate the paperwork and process of obtaining benefits and services from the Department of Veteran Affairs.

## Anger, irritability

Anger is an emotion that can range from mild annoyance to intense rage. People may become angry when they feel threatened, harmed, or powerless.

Some Veterans may be more likely to feel anger in everyday situations because of a traumatic event from past military experience, such as **combat, physical or sexual abuse, injury, or the loss of a buddy from their unit**. Others may experience anger because of the **stress of such life events as preparing for deployment, transitioning from service, changing jobs, retiring from work, or because of family or job dispute**.

Slightly different from anger, irritability is having a general tendency to be easily frustrated or impatient. Sometimes, irritability causes people to lash out at others, which can put a strain on personal and work relationships.

## How Can Anger After a Trauma Become a Problem?

In people with PTSD, their response to extreme threat can become "stuck." This may lead to responding to all stress in survival mode. If you have PTSD, you may be more likely to react to any stress with "full activation." You may react as if your life or self were threatened.

## Intrusive Thoughts

### LADY MACBETH [Macbeth Act V, scene 1]

Out, damned spot! out, I say!—  
 One: two: why, then, 'tis time to do't.—  
 Hell is murky!—  
 Fie, my lord, fie! a soldier, and afeard?  
 What need we fear who knows it,  
 when none can call our power to account?—  
 Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him.  
 The thane of Fife had a wife: where is she now?—  
 What, will these hands ne'er be clean?—  
 No more o' that, my lord, no more o' that: you mar all with this starting.  
 Here's the smell of the blood still:  
 all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand.  
 Oh, oh, oh!  
 Wash your hands, put on your nightgown;  
 look not so pale.—





