Caring for our Heroes: Exploring effects on Pre and Post 9/11 veteran caregivers

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Introduction
- American service members have been fighting wars for decades and coming home as American heroes.
- However, many veterans experience medical and psychological demands that require care.
- Unpaid veteran caregivers have been helping veteran for decades, but the need has grown.
- Veteran caregivers can be an unpaid family member, friend, or paid nurse who provide a broad range of care and assistance to current or former veterans with disabilities and/or illness (1).
- Veteran caregivers are the backbone of many veterans. Still, this major role can become a strain on the caregivers, causing emotional, physically, mentally and financial strain (1).
- The Veteran Caregiver Reducing Stress Time (VetCareReST) Study was designed to address pre and post 9/11 caregiver needs.

Research Questions
- What are pre- and post-9/11 veterans medical and psychological needs?
- What services are provided by caregivers?
- How many? 5.5 million caregivers in the United States.
- Who are they? Caregivers differ by veteran generation (see figure below)

Method: Literature Review
- Explore the literature regarding: a) history of Korean and Vietnam War, b) Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom, c) medical and psychological needs of these veterans, and d) care provided by caregivers.
- Define Veteran Caregiver and their duties
- Identify the type of impact caregiving has on veterans caregivers including:
  - Mental and Physical distress
  - Family distress
  - Marriage distress
  - Financial Strain
- Sources: Library Search Engines

Veterans
- Pre and Post 9/11 Veterans experience a range of medical and psychological needs that can differ based on explore during war/combat:

**Chart 1: Chart between the pre and post veterans**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre 9/11</th>
<th>Post 9/11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agent Orange</td>
<td>Traumatic Explosive Device</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cold Injury</td>
<td>Traumatic Brain Injury</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delay Mental Health</td>
<td>Mental Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing Loss</td>
<td>Hearing Loss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military Sexual Trauma</td>
<td>Military Sexual Trauma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infections</td>
<td>Spinal Cord Injury</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Network help</td>
<td>Lack of Network Help</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Veteran Caregivers
- Definition: Family member, friend, or nurse giving care to wounded, aging and disabled veterans.
- How many? 5.5 million caregivers in the United State
- Who are they? Caregivers differ by veteran generation (see figure below)

**Figure 1: Pre and Post 9/11 Caregivers**

- Implication for Veteran Caregivers
  - Younger caregiver are at higher risk of experiencing mental distress.
  - Veteran caregivers tend to be socially isolated (1).
  - Caregivers are more likely to spend less time with family and friends after becoming caregivers.
  - The VA provides some support for caregivers such as financial and social support.

**Graph 1: Caregiver demographics and consequences of caring for a veteran**

- Implication for Veteran Caregivers
  - Caregivers have a high levels of physical health problems (3)
    - Heart Disease
    - Hypertension
    - Weak immune system
    - Reduced sleep
  - Dealing with mental distress (2, 3)
    - Depression
    - Anxiety
    - Some even experience substance use
  - Secondary Trauma (see below)

**Figure 2: Secondary Trauma by Bride & Figley (2009)**

- Implications For Future Work
  - More research regarding the differences in need and care for pre- and post-9/11 veterans is needed.
  - Longitudinal research on the impact of caring for a veteran are needed as most recent reports focus on current care consequences.

References

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