

SUICIDE PREVENTION CONCEPTS

WISCONSIN VETERANS' INTERVENTION
PROGRAM

**LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND:
VETERANS IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE
SYSTEM**

June 29-30 – Madison, Milwaukee, and Tomah

Inferring Suicide Risk Among Incarcerated Veterans

- There is a significant lack of data available on suicide rates among incarcerated veterans.

Recommended Reading: “Suicide Among Incarcerated Veterans”

- Wortzel, Binswanger, Anderson and Adler, Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law, Volume 27, Number 1, 2009.

Suicide in the veteran population.

- Male veterans are twice as likely as civilians of either gender to commit suicide.
- 1000 suicides occur per year among veterans receiving VA care.
- 5000 suicides occur per year among all living veterans .

Suicide Rate among Inmates (2002)

- 47 per 100,000 in jails.
- 14 per 100,000 in prisons.

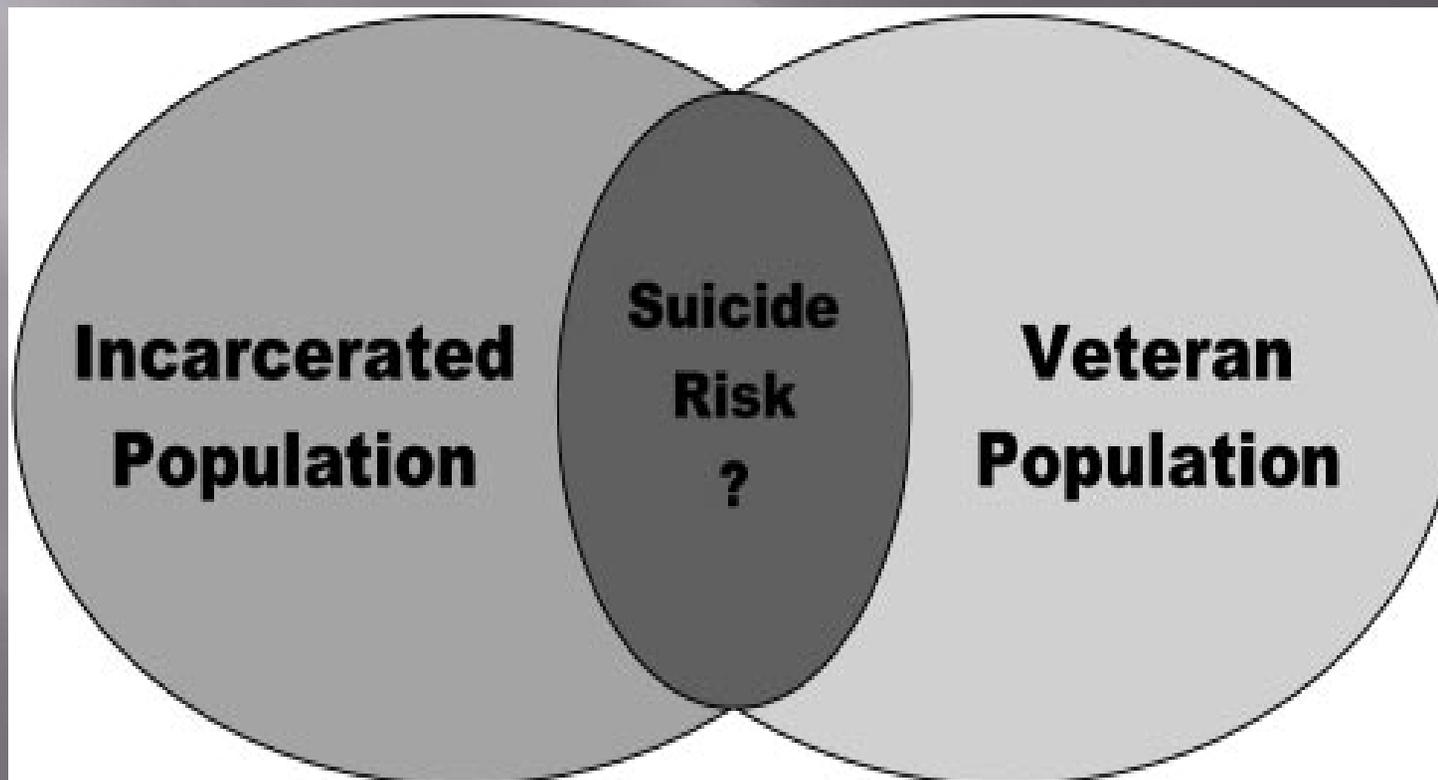
INCARCERATED VETS

Between 1994 and 1997,
15.7 percent of all male users of
VA mental health services had been
incarcerated at some point.

- Released inmates face death rates over 12 times that of the general population in the first two weeks following release.

- Suicide risk is heightened during the period immediately following discharge from inpatient psychiatric units.

“Incarcerated veterans are at the intersection of two populations with elevated suicide rates. The risk incurred by this status remains unknown.”



The returning veteran moves across large bureaucracies.

- active military
- the VA
- community-based health care systems
- potentially jail
- and then potentially to prison.

Managing Transitions

- Potential targets for intervention involve the multiple periods of transition faced by our returning veterans.
- As individuals move from one system to another, treatment lapses often occur.
- Critical information may fail to move along with the patient.

Becoming familiar with the symptom picture.

- Hopelessness
- Drug/ETOH abuse
- Rage, anger, revenge seeking
- Feeling trapped
- Withdrawing from family, friends
- Agitation, anxiety
- No sense of purpose in life
- Recent losses (physical, financial, personal)
- Impulsivity and poor self-control

Symptom Picture: OIF/OEF

- Among OIF/OEF vets, insomnia and anger are almost universal symptoms.
- Among OIF/OEF vets who are court involved, insomnia, anger, impulsivity and a sense of purposelessness are extremely common.

In suicide prevention efforts among OIF/OEF service members and vets, three crucial elements are now being considered:

- ❖ THWARTED BELONGINGNESS
- ❖ PERCEIVED BURDENSOMENESS
- ❖ DESENSITIZATION TO LETHALITY AND DEATH

Thwarted belongingness.

- ❖ The sense that one does not belong to a valued group despite the wish and attempts to belong.
- ❖ Feeling ignored, invisible, casually or purposefully rejected.
- ❖ Feeling that one's suffering is ridiculed or ignored.

Perceived burdensomeness.

- ❖ Perceived loss of effectiveness.
- ❖ Believing one's situation to be permanent and negatively affecting others.
- ❖ Believing that removal of self is the solution for other's wellbeing.

Desensitization to pain, lethal injury and death.

- ❖ Humans have a built in self-protection against pain, injury and death.
- ❖ The ability to injure others or cause oneself pain takes time and repetition.
- ❖ Threat becomes mundane and unexciting.
- ❖ Deployment into theater accomplishes this desensitization.

Current conceptualization:

- Suicide is usually in response to unmanageable physical or emotional pain, shame, hopelessness, grief, disconnectedness, and other very difficult personal struggles.

What can we do? Ask the questions!

- Do you sometimes think life is not worth living?
- Have you been thinking about killing yourself?
- Do you have a plan?

What can we do?

- Refer for mental health evaluation.
- In critical situations, provide constant “eyes on” supervision until a mental health evaluation is done.
- When symptoms are acute, be very assertive in providing/enforcing a secure environment with appropriate means restriction.

For returning vets:

- Normalize: Tell returning veterans that their symptoms are very common.
- Communicate a message of hope: Tell returning veteran's that treatment can be helpful.

Questions?