

**ILAPSC 2020  
CONFERENCE**

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**ASSISTING VETERANS**

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# Psychosocial Needs

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“More than half of justice-involved Veterans have either mental health problems—namely PTSD, depression, or high anxiety—or substance-abuse disorders, most notably alcohol or cocaine addiction. According to Dr. Andrea Finlay, a large percentage of these Veterans are also homeless or at-risk for homelessness, and many others face such challenges as finding work and reintegrating into society. Plus, Veterans who collide with the criminal justice system may be at higher risk for suicide.”

# TBI & PTSD relationship at a glance

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## **TBI**

- Increased impulsiveness
- Decreased inhibition
- Lower threshold for frustration
- Lack of self awareness

## **Co-Occurring Symptoms**

Irritability, anger, depression, sensitivity to sounds, impaired concentration, memory deficits, sleep disturbances, fatigue, emotional dysregulation, reduced problem solving skills, changes in thinking

## **PTSD**

- Hypervigilance
- Avoidance
- Intrusive thoughts / flashbacks

# Vignette

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- Charlie: Combat Veteran, diagnosed with mTBI, PTSD (due to Humvee hit by IED)

Charlie is divorced and has two children that live with his ex-wife. He works as a house painter and finds several of his coworkers difficult to relate to, because none of them are Veterans. He often has a few beers after work, before going home to take the edge off. On the drive home, he is stuck in traffic, amidst construction, has a headache and the glare from the setting sun irritates his eyes. The heavy machinery produces loud booming sounds as the demolition of the left lane continues. Charlie notices the smell of diesel fuel. He begins to feel trapped because he cannot exit the road, and traffic is at a standstill. As a result his experiences in a convoy in Iraq, being stuck in traffic activates symptoms of PTSD such as intrusive thoughts and hypervigilance. To escape the situation, Charlie takes off to the right lane which is another a closed lane. He is pulled over by the police shortly after. When the police approach the vehicle, Charlie is flustered, sweaty, irritable and argumentative and does not explain his intention or needs clearly. He does not hear the Officer clearly and does not ask for clarification, just answers irritably. He is subsequently charged with a DUI, driving on a suspended license and receives a Scotts Law ticket.

# The Intersection

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## Symptoms

- Interpersonal difficulties (PTSD & TBI)
- Irritability (PTSD & TBI)
- Reduced Problem-Solving Skills (PTSD & TBI)
- Hypervigilance
- Emotional dysregulation
- Headache and light sensitivity (TBI)
- Mild – moderate hearing loss (as result of IED, and continual exposure to artillery).

## Response

- Alcohol use, to calm nerves
- Alcohol use to calm nerves
- Takes off into right lane
- Feelings of panic (danger is coming = seek safety) - goes into right lane.
- Irritability, argumentative with Officer.
- Irritability, anger about TBI, frustrated with treatment, feels system has failed him.
- Anger re: hearing impairment at young age, refuses hearing aides.

## A referral to Veterans Court is made! Which means the VJO completed a comprehensive biopsychosocial assessment.

### Criminal needs

- DUI, Driving on Revoked, Scotts Law
- Support through probation
- Support meeting court requirements.

### Civil needs

- Back owed child support (in arrears due the time he was medically separated from service and did not know to report a drastic income change).
- Credit counseling assistance due to overuse of credit cards.
- Help with reinstatement of Drivers License.

### Treatment needs

- Next slide – treatment plan based on biopsychosocial assessment.

# Treatment Courts



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- Court mandated Treatment plans: Address WHOLE person (Charlie).
    - Substance use disorder treatment
    - Comprehensive psychiatric evaluation
    - Individual and group therapy for PTSD
    - TBI clinic referral for the treatment of chronic headaches and possible speech therapy to address memory needs and concentration deficits & referral to audiology.
    - Encouraged to participate in prosocial therapeutic recreation activities with other Veterans, who he may relate to.
    - All treatment plans and recommendations will be printed on a court order, to aid in Veterans memory and concentration deficits. The court team is aware of the above diagnosis and treatment plans and receives Veteran in a welcoming, supportive manner. Directions are clear and concise yet not condescending.



# PROGRESSION THROUGH VETERANS COURT

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- Each milestone is rewarded (ex: completed substance use disorder treatment may result in a promotion of phases, or a gift card). Fellow Veterans offer supportive applause or accolades.
- Relapse happens      therapeutic intervention vs. court sanction (i.e. writing assignment, early curfew, assigned to provide UDS more often, etc)



Nothing could be worse than the fear that one had given up too soon, and left one unexpended effort that might have saved the world.

— *Jane Addams* —

# References

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Fitzpatrick, Michael J., & Velazquez, Tracy (2011, November, 11) . *Collateral Damage: Incarceration of Veterans*. Justice Policy Institute, <http://www.justicepolicy.org/news/3172>

Gafford, Jennifer, McMillian, Bradley, Gorgens, Kim, Dettmer, Judy, Glover, Nicole (2015, June, 19). *A Unique Approach to Traumatic Brain Injury in a County jail*. National Institute of Corrections, <https://info.nicic.gov/virt/sites/info.nicic.gov/virt/files/Traumatic-Brain-Injury-Screening-Paper.pdf>

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# References

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Richman, Mike (2018, September, 7) *Veterans and the Criminal Justice System*, VA Research Communications, <https://www.research.va.gov/currents/0918-VA-researcher-examines-Vets-who-collide-with-criminal-justice-system.cfm>

# Interesting Articles

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- Jennifer Bronson, Ph.D., E. Ann Carson, Ph.D., and Margaret Noonan, BJS Statisticians  
Marcus Berzofsky, Dr.P.H., (2015 December). RTI International *Veterans in Prison and Jail  
2011-12*. US Department of Justice, <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/vpj1112.pdf>
- Pinals, Debra, A. (2010). Veterans and the Justice System: The Next Forensic frontier. *The  
Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law* 38(5) 163 – 167
- **Useful Websites:**
- <https://justiceforvets.org/>
- <https://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/VJO.asp>
- <https://www.nadcp.org/>
- <https://bjs.gov/>