

Background

- 2.3 million Americans (1 in every 100) are incarcerated.
- 95% of prisoners will eventually be released from prison.
- Geriatric prisoners (age ≥ 55) are the most rapidly growing and expensive prisoner population.
- Little is known about health or post-release plans of geriatric prisoners awaiting release.
- The few services that exist for former geriatric prisoners are geared towards veterans.

Objectives

1. To characterize health status and risk of homelessness of geriatric prisoners who will be released within 2 years
2. To compare veterans to nonveterans

Methods

- Cross-sectional study of 360 prisoners, aged 55 or older, within 2 years of release from prison
- 2004 Survey of Inmates in State and Federal Correctional Facilities, a population-based sample of US prisoners
- **Outcomes:**
 - Health status** – self report of 11 chronic conditions, 3 serious mental illnesses and PTSD
 - Risk of post-release homelessness** – homeless prior to arrest, plans to live alone after release
- **Predictor: Veteran status** – self-report
- **Statistical Analysis**
Descriptive statistics to characterize the cohort, weights account for sampling design

Results

Table 1. Sociodemographics of geriatric prisoners

Characteristic, %	Veterans (N=142)	Nonveterans (N=218)	p-value
Age (mean, range)	61 (55-84)	60 (55-78)	0.07
Male	99.7	89.9	<0.001
Married	34.4	27.7	0.003
White	76.7	43.3	<0.001
African American	15.6	31.9	0.001
Latino/Hispanic	4.3	22.2	<0.001
HS diploma or GED	71.1	41.7	<0.001
Employed at arrest	70.7	69.0	0.74
# Previous arrests (mean)	2.8	3.3	0.36

Table 1 Summary. Veterans were more likely to be men, married, have H.S. diploma or GED, and white.

Table 2. Health status of geriatric prisoners

Characteristic, %	Veterans (N=142)	Nonveterans (N=218)	p-value
Medical conditions (0-11*), No. ≥1 medical condition	2.1 78.1	2.0 79.7	0.55 0.75
Hypertension	49.6	53.3	0.53
Diabetes	20.1	20.6	0.91
Psychiatric conditions (0-3**), No. ≥1 psychiatric condition	0.3 14.6	0.2 13.0	0.23 0.69
Post-traumatic stress disorder	12.6	2.3	<0.001

* cancer, paralysis, hypertension, brain injury or stroke, diabetes, heart problems, kidney problems, arthritis, asthma, cirrhosis and hepatitis.

** major depressive disorder, bipolar disorder, and psychotic disorders

Table 2 Summary. Geriatric pre-release prisoners had a similar burden of medical and psychiatric conditions regardless of veteran status.

Table 3. Military characteristics of geriatric veterans awaiting release

Military Characteristic, %	Veterans (N=142)
Combat Veteran	34.8
Served in Vietnam era	69.4
Honorable or general/honorable discharge	77.2

Table 3 Summary. Combat experience was common and most were likely eligible for VA services (based on type of discharge).

Table 4. Homelessness risk of geriatric prisoners

Risk factor, %	Veterans (N=142)	Nonveterans (N=218)	p-value
Homeless prior to arrest	10.5	7.0	0.30
Plans to live alone after release	31.6	24.3	0.16

Table 4 Summary. Geriatric veterans and nonveterans were similar in terms of risk of homelessness.

Conclusions

- Geriatric pre-release prisoners had high rates of medical conditions, serious mental illness, and risk of post-release homelessness, regardless of veteran status.
- As such, former geriatric prisoners have the potential to place a significant burden on community healthcare and social service systems.
- Reentry and homelessness prevention programs of equal breadth and caliber to those already provided by the VA to veterans should be created for soon-to-be-released nonveteran geriatric prisoners.