

Investigating the U.S. Veterans Affairs: An Analysis of Mental Health Services and Racial
Disparities in VA Initiatives and the Efficacy of Community Therapy Organizations



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Abstract

In my thesis, I am exploring how the treatment of U.S. veterans' access to mental healthcare varies depending on race. I argue that the United States Department of Veterans Affairs has changed over the course of the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars to provide more access to mental health care for racial/ ethnic minority veterans of all wars. I explore how outside barriers, such as socioeconomic status, historical distrust of healthcare institutions, and the bureaucracy of the VA contribute to racial disparities that exist for minority veterans. Healthcare inequality has been at the forefront of American problems for decades, and I examine how racial/ethnic minority veterans experience mental health care based on their intersecting identity of race and veteran status. By looking at how the VA has changed its policies and worked to limit racial disparities in recent years, I hope to start a conversation about how the VA may be used as a toolkit for other providers or healthcare institutions across the U.S. While looking the macro-level of the experiences of veterans in the nation and the larger, institutional matters related to VA policies, I also take a micro-focus on specific art therapy programs for veterans. I examine how community veteran organizations are effective in supplementing services that the VA doesn't provide and what the strategies used in such therapy programs are.

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