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Disabilities from the U.S. Army

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<b>13. ABSTRACT (Maximum 200 Words)</b> Our goal is to describe the natural history of disability, from initial injury through discharge from military service to long-term outcomes. The specific objectives are: (1) develop and employ methodology for linking US Army and VA databases for Army service personnel discharged with physical disabilities; (2) identify and compare correlates of long-term outcomes among all US Army personnel discharged with disabilities, focusing first on severe or frequent disability types; (3) assess the feasibility of linking VA databases with other armed service databases that track disability related discharges. This is a retrospective study of veterans who were discharged with a disability from the military between 1985-1999. We are creating a cohort of a random sample of US Army members discharged with either a knee or back related disability, or a knee or back hospitalization within 7 years prior to discharge. Added to this sample is a control group composed of soldiers discharged without any disability or hospitalizations. The control group was selected using a 1:1 sampling ratio per year of discharge. The cohort of 280,444 is composed of 140,222 cases and 140,222 controls. The SSNs for members of the cohort were released to MAVERIC by the USARIEM and were linked to VA inpatient and outpatient utilization data at the Austin Computer Center for fiscal years 1985 to 2000. All matching data records were identified and transferred to MAVERIC and prepared for linkage with the Army records assembled at USARIEM. We are preparing to send the VA utilization and Army records for the cohort to a third party, the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC). Expected analyses will focus on the following outcomes: type and intensity of VA services received, change in disability status, and mortality. These outcomes will be correlated with risk factors drawn from the demographic, utilization, and health habits variables found in the USARIEM database.				
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## Introduction

This is a unique collaboration between investigators from the US Army Research Institute of Environmental Medicine (USARIEM) and the VA Health Service Research Program/Massachusetts Veterans Epidemiological Research and Information Center (MAVERIC). Both groups of investigators have extensive experience working with their respective databases, merging large complex databases, and conducting epidemiological and health services research. This is an opportunity for the VA to understand which disabled veterans obtain care in the VA and identify predictors of the type and intensity of service utilization. The VA can use this information to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of its delivery system. It is an opportunity for the Army to recapture lost follow-up time on important disability cases. Such information is needed in order to elucidate the natural history of many injury and disease processes for which there is a general lack of information and possibly no source of comparable data in the civilian section. This information could have great utility to the military services for informing the process of recruiting and training soldiers, as well as the medical management of soldiers who suffer disabling conditions. The ability to detect death, disability, and deteriorating health status related to service (but not manifesting itself until well after discharge) will also be of significant benefit to the DoD.

## Body

Task 1: USARIEM establishes study cohort using TAIHOD database. Prepares index file with subject Ids to send to VA.

USARIEM established a cohort of Army discharges using the TAIHOD database. The cohort consists of 280,444 veterans discharged from the military between 1985-1999. The cohort is composed of 3 groups of cases and a matching number of controls. 85,676 cases are disability discharges of no specific nature; 15,508 have a disability record but were not discharged due to the disability; and 39,038 had a hospitalization for a knee or back injury within 5 years of discharge, but were not discharged with a disability. The cohort consists of 140,222 controls without any disability records or hospitalizations. Page 12 of the appendix is a flow chart that outlines how the cases and controls were selected.

We will be focusing initial analyses on the subset of soldiers with either discharges due to a knee or back injury (22,200), the subset of soldiers with a knee or back disability record (1,700) but not discharged due to the disability, and the soldiers with hospitalization for a knee or back injury within 5 years of discharge but were not discharged with a disability (39,038).

Prior to the creation of this cohort, a pilot study was conducted with the purpose of determining the proportion of VA enrollees and the volume of VA utilization data expected. USARIEM selected 3000 Army personnel discharged in either 1982 or 1983. The sample of 3000 subjects consisted of 1000 disability discharges, 1000 with a history of knee or back hospitalization but not a disability discharge, and 1000 controls with no history of disability discharge or knee or back related hospitalization. This sample was passed through the inpatient and outpatient data files at the VA national computer center. Utilization data from 1980 to 2000 was collected. 28.7% of the sample had an inpatient encounter and 55.7% had an outpatient encounter at least once between 1980 and 2000. The group of veterans with a permanent disability had the greatest number of encounters (60.2% inpatient, 93.5% outpatient), followed by those with a knee or back hospitalization (23.1% inpatient, 55.9% outpatient). The control group had the fewest people receiving care from the VA healthcare system (7.9% inpatient, 24.0% outpatient). Page 13 of the appendix is a table of the findings of this pilot work.

Task 2. Merge TAIHOD index file with VA utilization data at VA national computer center. Transfer of matched inpatient and outpatient data records to Boston VA Healthcare facility.

The index file of 280,444 SSNs was released to the VA from USARIEM and matched with all utilization data at the VA national computer center for fiscal years 1985-2000. The results of the inpatient matches can be found on pages 14-15 of the appendix, and the outpatient results are outlined on page 16. The index file was also matched with data from the Compensation and Pension file

and the BIRLS mortality database. All matching records were transferred to the VA Boston Healthcare System. Page 17 of the appendix is a table of the VA utilization files used and their location in the national computer center.

Task 3. Creation of analytic data file from the TAIHOD database.

Army records for members of the cohort were assembled at USARIEM. The study cohort SSNs were matched against TAIHOD personnel files (demographics, discharge/loss), hospitalization, physical disability boards, and casualty (death) files. All records matching the cohort SSNs were kept. Page 18 of the appendix is a table of the TAIHOD files used and their contents.

Task 4. Linkage of matched VA utilization data with TAIHOD data files.

A third party, the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC), is now linking the data sets compiled by the VA and USARIEM. A new subject ID was created for each SSN within the VA and Army data files. All data files were sent to the DMDC where they are converting the subject ID created by the VA and USARIEM to a completely new subject ID. The final analytic data set returned to the VA and USARIEM will be stripped of all identifiers except for the ID created by DMDC. Analyses will then be conducted using these data. Linkage of the many data sets will be possible using the new ID added to each file.

Task 5. Analyses of VA research questions.

We have not completed this task of the project at this time.

Task 6. Analyses of US Army research questions.

We have not completed this task of the project at this time.

Task 7. Final analyses, prepare final report and manuscripts for publication.

We have not completed this task of the project at this time.

## Key Research Accomplishments

There are no research accomplishments to report at this time.

## Reportable Outcomes

### Presentations:

Wright S. Using VA and U.S. Army databases for disability research. Consortium of Injury Disability Research Symposium, 3/2001.

Wright S. Administrative health data Systems in the VA. Fourteenth Conference on Military Medicine - A Challenge to Readiness: Injuries in the Military. 4/2001.

### Manuscripts:

A manuscript that explores the overview and concepts of the project is currently in progress. The paper is titled "From Soldier to Veteran: Linking Data from the DoD and VA to Study the Natural History of Injury-Related Disability". Topics include the background on the need for this type of research, the goals of our project, specifics on how the study is being conducted, unique methods for protecting confidentiality (1), and the future benefits.

## **Conclusions**

There are no conclusions to report at this time.

## References

1. U.S. General Accounting Office, *Record Linkage and Privacy: Issues in creating new federal research and statistical information*. 2001, U.S. General Accounting Office: Washington, D.C.

## Appendices

Page 12: Flow chart that outlines how the cases and controls within the cohort were selected.

Page 13: Results of pilot work on sample of 3000 Veterans; VA utilization matches for years 1980-2000.

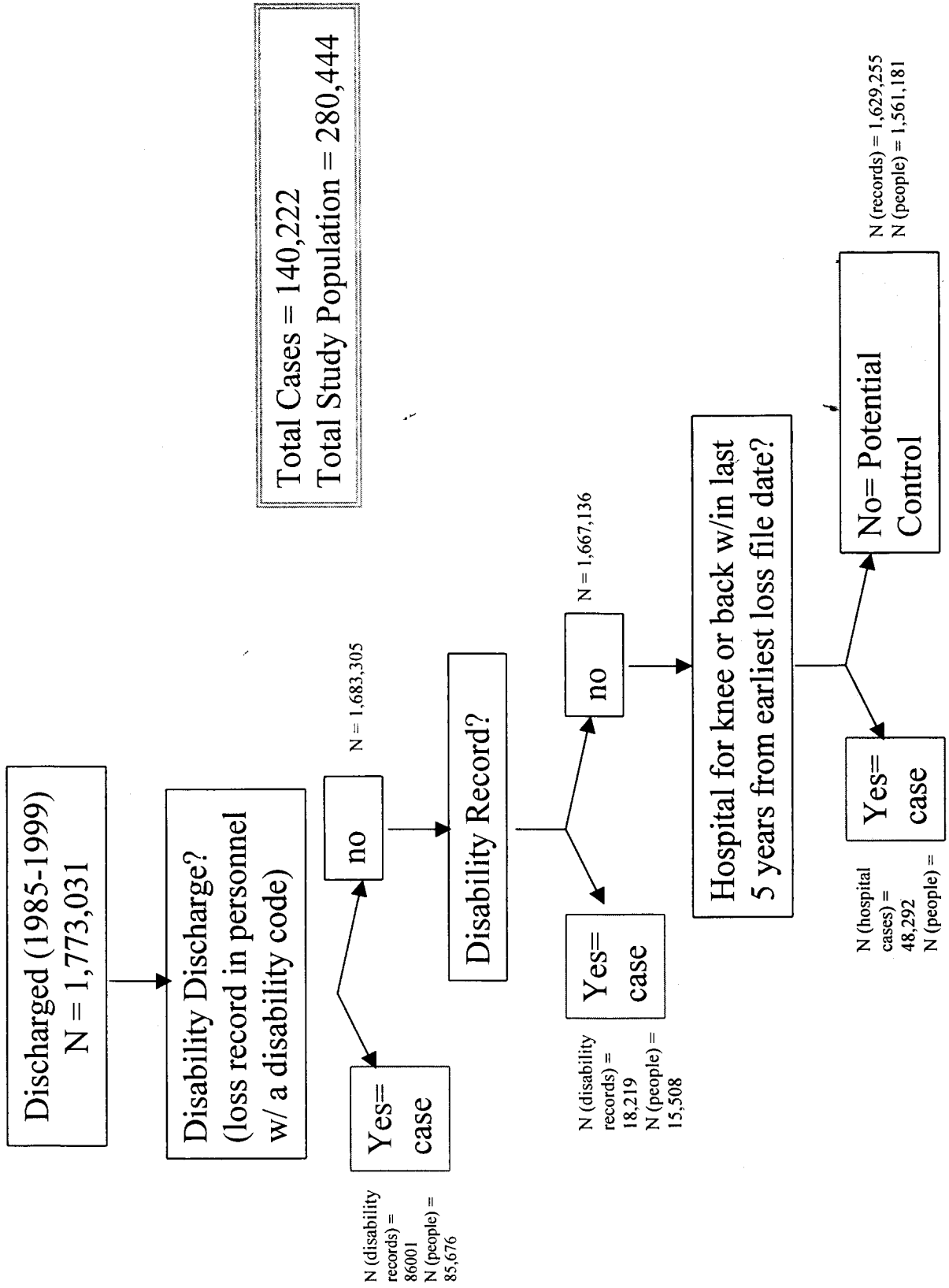
Pages 14-15: Results of matching the index file with all the VA inpatient utilization files at the VA national computer center.

Page 16: Results of matching the index file with all the VA outpatient utilization files at the VA national computer center.

Page 17: Table of all VA utilization files used and their locations at the VA national computer center.

Page 18: Table of all TAIHOD data used and their sources.

# Flow-Chart for Case and Control Selection: Active Duty Army Soldiers



VA Inpatient and Outpatient Utilization during years 1980-2000 for Pilot Study of 3000 Subjects

YEAR	Deaths			In-Patient Visits						Out-Patient Visits										
	Perm. Dis	Knee or Back Hosp	No Dis. Or Hosp.	Total	Perm. Dis		Knee or Back Hosp		No Dis. Or Hosp.		Total	Perm. Dis		Knee or Back Hosp		No Dis. Or Hosp.				
					%	n	%	n	%	n		%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	
1980	0	0	0	0	0.9%	9	0.6%	6	0.1%	1	0.5%	16	0.3%	3	0.2%	2	0.2%	2	0.2%	7
1981	11	4	2	17	7.6%	76	0.4%	4	0.3%	3	2.8%	83	5.2%	52	1.9%	19	0.4%	4	2.5%	75
1982	32	4	2	38	11.0%	109	1.7%	17	0.6%	6	4.4%	132	12.2%	121	5.6%	56	2.1%	21	6.6%	198
1983	17	2	3	22	14.1%	135	2.1%	21	0.4%	4	5.4%	160	15.4%	147	7.1%	70	2.5%	25	8.2%	242
1984	7	2	2	11	11.9%	112	2.0%	20	0.6%	6	4.7%	138	12.7%	119	5.6%	55	1.6%	16	6.5%	190
1985	7	4	1	12	11.9%	111	1.7%	17	0.8%	8	4.7%	136	18.6%	174	7.1%	70	1.3%	13	8.8%	257
1986	5	2	2	9	10.3%	95	2.8%	28	0.7%	7	4.5%	130	34.4%	319	14.2%	140	2.9%	29	16.8%	488
1987	6	2	1	9	12.3%	113	2.9%	28	0.9%	9	5.2%	150	43.4%	400	17.8%	175	5.1%	50	21.6%	625
1988	7	3	0	10	10.1%	92	2.7%	26	0.6%	6	4.3%	124	44.0%	403	17.1%	168	4.1%	40	21.2%	611
1989	9	4	0	13	8.8%	80	3.0%	29	0.9%	9	4.1%	118	42.4%	385	18.9%	185	4.4%	43	21.3%	613
1990	4	2	0	6	10.0%	90	2.4%	23	0.7%	7	1.4%	40	41.9%	377	18.4%	179	4.3%	42	20.9%	598
1991	4	2	1	7	10.6%	95	2.6%	25	1.1%	11	4.6%	131	41.7%	373	17.7%	172	4.8%	47	20.8%	592
1992	5	2	2	9	10.4%	93	3.2%	31	0.8%	8	4.6%	132	42.3%	377	19.5%	189	4.6%	45	21.5%	611
1993	7	1	1	9	8.4%	74	2.9%	28	0.6%	6	3.8%	108	41.2%	365	18.7%	181	4.8%	47	20.9%	593
1994	7	0	2	9	10.4%	91	3.6%	35	0.5%	5	4.6%	131	40.6%	357	20.9%	202	5.5%	54	21.7%	613
1995	5	4	2	11	10.2%	89	4.0%	39	1.8%	18	5.2%	146	43.6%	380	21.0%	203	5.9%	58	22.7%	641
1996	13	3	1	17	9.0%	78	3.6%	35	1.4%	14	4.5%	127	43.6%	378	21.2%	204	6.7%	66	23.1%	648
1997	10	3	2	15	7.8%	67	3.1%	30	0.8%	8	3.8%	105	43.0%	367	22.6%	217	6.9%	67	7.8%	217
1998	9	3	0	12	8.2%	69	4.1%	39	0.5%	5	4.1%	113	43.6%	368	24.2%	231	7.2%	70	24.1%	669
1999	16	5	1	22	7.2%	60	2.7%	26	0.8%	8	3.4%	94	44.3%	370	26.2%	250	7.6%	74	25.1%	694
2000	13	4	3	20	7.9%	65	2.1%	20	0.2%	2	3.2%	87	46.2%	378	26.6%	252	7.6%	74	25.7%	704
Total	194	56	28	278	60.2%	485	23.1%	218	7.9%	77	28.7%	780	93.5%	754	55.9%	528	24.0%	233	55.7%	1515

## Results of Matching Index File with VA Inpatient Utilization Files

Main File 1985-1990										
FY	Number Records in File	Number Matching Records	Number People	Average # Visits	Min # Visits	Max # Visits	First VA Encounter	VA Encounter Before DOD Discharge	Avg # Days between Visit and Dis.	Age (Avg., Min, Max)
1985	1,031,298	692	519	1.3	1	16	519	352	859	28.3, 17, 76
1986	1,055,251	1787	1179	1.5	1	83	1043	303	674	28.9, 18, 68
1987	1,055,456	2653	1842	1.4	1	12	1444	294	594	28.8, 17, 82
1988	1,071,146	3695	2478	1.5	1	20	1792	331	602	29.6, 18, 69
1989	1,055,251	4451	2979	1.5	1	17	1952	287	458	30.2, 17, 60
1990	981,887	4087	2693	1.5	1	85	1571	181	485	30.9, 18, 90
1991	944,162	5829	3690	1.58	1	154	2124	226	442	31.2, 18, 66
1992	922,514	6319	4104	1.54	1	57	2242	198	529	31.7, 18, 92
1993	909,896	7085	4640	1.53	1	62	2437	181	454	32.3, 18, 93
1994	901,665	8094	5229	1.55	1	94	2635	197	455	33.2, 18, 94
1995	873,975	8308	5279	1.57	1	17	2448	159	401	33.9, 18, 76
1996	809,717	8334	5224	1.6	1	19	2251	176	407	35.2, 18, 63
1997	671,087	7268	4618	1.57	1	28	1822	138	333	35.7, 17, 69
1998	604,946	6549	4202	1.56	1	17	1583	88	211	36.5, 18, 67
1999	581,226	6593	4273	1.54	1	21	1617	53	124	37.0, 19, 70
2000	564,013	6401	4194	1.53	1	14	1460	1	345	38.4, 20, 71
Total	14,033,490	88145	28940	2.9	1	230	28940	3165	532	32.9, 17, 94

Bedsection File 1985-1990									
FY	Number Records in File	Number Matching Records	Number People	Average # Visits	Min # Visits	Max # Visits	First VA Encounter	VA Encounter Before DOD Discharge	Avg # Days between Visit and Dis.
1985	1,297,706	786	519	1.5	1	16	519	352	859
1986	1,365,202	2055	1179	1.7	1	83	1043	303	674
1987	1,424,165	3142	1842	1.4	1	14	1444	294	594
1988	1,432,528	4368	2478	1.4	1	20	1792	331	602
1989	1,355,361	5211	2979	1.4	1	20	1952	287	458
1990	1,273,331	5604	3238	2.0	1	85	1899	225	502
1991	1,238,618	6658	3690	1.8	1	154	2031	223	434
1992	1,231,580	7337	4104	1.79	1	57	2209	198	529
1993	1,212,875	8148	4640	1.76	1	62	2419	181	454
1994	1,199,831	9295	5229	1.78	1	94	2626	197	455
1995	1,164,709	9697	5279	1.84	1	22	2440	159	401
1996	1,091,516	9765	5224	1.87	1	27	2242	176	407
1997	913,990	8552	4618	1.85	1	28	1819	138	333
1998	831,480	7833	4202	1.86	1	27	1578	88	211
1999	797,061	7883	4273	1.84	1	21	1617	53	124
2000	762,483	7762	4194	1.85	1	16	1455	1	345
Total	18,592,436	104096	29085	3.38	1	233	29085	3206	532

Surgery File 1985-1990									
FY	Number Records in File	Number Matching Records	Number People	Average # Surg.	Min # Surg.	Max # Surg.	First VA Encounter	VA Encounter Before DOD Discharge	Avg # Days between Visit and Dis.
1985	293,004	191	143	1.3	1	12	143	90	979
1986	290,510	444	352	1.3	1	11	329	82	1038
1987	279,860	716	532	1.3	1	16	485	65	671
1988	274,331	892	718	1.2	1	10	610	75	869
1989	263,869	1099	905	1.2	1	8	750	63	719
1990	253,658	1201	984	1.2	1	8	768	44	630
1991	243,740	1359	1135	1.2	1	9	861	56	505
1992	239,313	1577	1305	1.2	1	9	1013	56	596
1993	234,930	1722	1419	1.2	1	10	1044	41	663
1994	228,275	1921	1600	1.2	1	8	1179	58	558
1995	214,397	1826	1524	1.2	1	9	1062	43	572
1996	189,572	1718	1420	1.2	1	10	975	55	512
1997	142,185	1340	1087	1.23	1	10	720	37	386
1998	118,585	1100	886	1.24	1	15	601	17	300
1999	114,764	1084	890	1.22	1	10	596	5	133
2000	109,088	1100	927	1.19	1	7	622	0	0
Total	3,490,081	19290	11758	1.55	1	40	11758	787	698

Procedure File 1988-1990									
FY	Number Records in File	Number Matching Records	Number People	Average # Proc.	Min # Proc.	Max # Proc.	First VA Encounter	VA Encounter Before DOD Discharge	Avg # Days between Visit and Dis.
1988	1,054,402	3358	1347	2.5	1	36	1347	217	522
1989	1,073,205	3806	1586	2.4	1	30	1275	178	522
1990	1,087,035	4528	1902	2.4	1	35	1404	159	437
1991	1,088,878	5545	2195	2.53	1	40	1440	140	411
1992	1,090,404	5987	2422	2.47	1	55	1497	114	448
1993	1,119,504	6774	2815	2.41	1	71	1668	104	364
1994	1,146,390	7932	3270	2.43	1	120	1873	118	467
1995	1,123,707	8016	3290	2.44	1	32	1744	94	389
1996	1,049,365	8643	3371	2.56	1	54	1682	110	353
1997	882,783	7267	2845	2.55	1	37	1304	81	338
1998	788,027	6189	2623	2.36	1	42	1159	60	210
1999	781,478	6488	2686	2.42	1	41	1196	32	176
2000	773,507	6441	2550	2.53	1	37	1027	1	345
Total	13,058,685	80974	18616	4.19	1	268	18616	1408	425

## Results of Matching Index File with VA Outpatient Utilization Files

FY	# of people	# of records	Mean # of visits	Min. # of visits	Max. # of visits	First VA Visit	VA visit before DOD discharge	Total # of records in AAC
1986	7,766	26,975	3.5	1	108	7,766	1,106	10,291,501
1987	15,974	77,725	4.9	1	225	11,327	1,621	20,074,180
1988	20,691	111,170	5.4	1	232	11,062	1,657	21,775,130
1989	23,739	131,447	5.5	1	344	9,945	1,294	21,230,674
1990	27,461	160,284	5.8	1	353	10,410	1,233	21,653,076
1991	30,625	190,178	6.2	1	354	10,171	969	22,286,848
1992	36,964	229,267	6.2	1	356	12,853	1,036	23,081,737
1993	41,374	263,439	6.4	1	354	12,664	1,039	23,329,385
1994	43,631	306,322	7.0	1	356	10,403	943	24,419,396
1995	46,260	351,474	7.6	1	353	9,637	755	26,501,144
1996	49,231	402,624	8.2	1	348	9,404	988	28,371,349
1997	53,853	475,574	8.8	1	276	10,031	949	47,495,447
1998	58,068	540,163	9.3	1	305	8,797	1,104	57,635,636
1999	61,043	584,738	9.6	1	336	8,614	709	61,666,068
2000	60,094	590,168	9.8	1	351	4,574	0	63,665,970
2001 (partial)	57,055	512,865	9.0	1	304	2,420	0	54,262,301
<b>Total</b>	<b>150,075</b>	<b>4,954,413</b>	<b>33.0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3,267</b>	<b>150,075</b>	<b>15,403</b>	

**Total # of DOD Cases = 280,444**

- People who had VA visits before DoD discharge  
n = 15,403  
Days before DoD discharge:  
Mean =781 days, median=393 days, Mode=1 day  
Min=1 day, Max=4,960 days
- People who are in VA and DoD databases  
n=150,078  
Age at the first VA encounter:  
Mean=30 yrs, Median=27 yrs, Mode=25 yrs  
Min=19 Max=54

## VA Utilization Files at National Computer Center

Description	Location	# of Variables	Comment
<b>Outpatient Files:</b>			
SF Files: Visit File			
FY91 - Present	MDPPRD.MDP.SAS.Sfyy	49	100% data
FY86 - FY90	MDPPRD.MDP.SAS.OPC.FYyy.F		100% data
FY80 - FY85	MDPPRD.MDP.STAFF.Syy		20% sample
SC Files: Procedure File			
FY90 - Present	MDPPRD.MDP.SAS.SCyy	45	100% data
SG Files: Diagnosis File			
FY97 - Present	MDPPRD.MDP.SAS.SGyy	21	100% data
SE Files: Event File			
FY99 - Present	MDPPRD.MDP.SAS.SEyy	79	100% data
<b>Inpatient Files:</b>			
PM Files: Main File			
FY91 - Present	MDPPRD.MDP.SAS.PMyy	73 - 79	100% data
FY84 - FY90	MDPPRD.MDP.SAS.VAH.PMyy	72	100% data
FY82 - FY83	MDPPRD.MDP.PTF.PyyG	77	100% data
FY70 - FY81	MDPPRD.MDP.PTF.Pyy	64 -71	100% data
PP Files: Procedure File			
FY91 - Present	MDPPRD.MDP.SAS.PPy	27	100% data
FY88 - FY90	MDPPRD.MDP.SAS.VAH.PPy		
PB Files: Bedsection File			
FY91 - Present	MDPPRD.MDP.SAS.PByy		100% data
FY84 - FY90	MDPPRD.MDP.SAS.VAH.PByy	--	
PS Files: Surgery File			
FY91 - Present	MDPPRD.MDP.SAS.PSyy	30	100% data
FY84 - FY90	MDPPRD.MDP.SAS.VAH.Psyy		
<b>SSN Files</b>			
OPC: FY86 - FY00	MDPPRD.PRO.SAS.Fyy.OPCSSNF		
<b>Compensation and Pension File</b>			
Current	MDPPRD.PRO.SAS.DMS.CPMINI	68	100% data
<b>BIRLS Mortality File</b>			
Current	MDPPRD.PRO.SAS.VHA.BIRLS. DEATHS	32	100% data

Note: yy=year of data

## TAIHOD Data Used for this Study

File Type	Years	Source	Contents
Demographics	1971-1999	Defense Manpower Data Center	Contains all demographic and occupational data including gender, race, ethnicity, marital status, time in service, ASVAB scores, primary and secondary MOSs.
Inpatient Hospitalization	1980-1999	Patient Administration Systems and Biostatistics Activities	Contains information regarding an inpatient visit, including up to eight diagnostic and four procedural codes per visit, dates of diagnosis and disposition, bed days, etc.
Disability	1980-1999	Army Disability Agency	Contains information regarding any appearance before a preliminary or final disability board, including VASRD code and final disposition.
Discharge	1971-2000	Defense Manpower Data Center	Contains information regarding the date and reason for discharge, and all demographics at the time of discharge.
Death	1980-1999	Directorate for Information Operations and Reports (DIOR)	Contains information regarding the circumstances of the casualty, including manner (accident, illness, etc), place, and date.