

## **Combat, Childhood Aggression Led to Violence in Vietnam Vets**

Many Vietnam veterans reported witnessing and participating in severe, abusive, unnecessary acts of violence during the war, such as killing civilians, torturing hostages or mutilating bodies of enemy soldiers. In the landmark study, the National Vietnam Veterans Readjustment Survey, 8% of veterans reported participating in these severely violent acts during the war. VISN 1 MIRECC researchers Matthew Nock, Joan Kaufman and Robert Rosenheck have now documented predictors of participation in this severe violence. The two most important factors were exposure to combat and a history of aggressive behavior before age 15. In addition, disruptive behavior during childhood and adolescence was the best predictor of postwar interpersonal violence. Severe violence was also indirectly linked to other negative childhood experiences including childhood physical abuse, family instability and mental illness in the family because these were related to childhood aggression. These findings suggest the need for better screening of recruits and volunteers as those with a history of childhood aggression may be at risk to commit unnecessary violent acts in wartime situations.