"THEY TEACH YOU HOW TO WEATHER THE STORM
BY THEY DON'T TEACH YOU HOW TO DANCE IN THE
RAIN:" VETERANS' PERSPECTIVES ON THE
PATHWAYS TO CRIMINAL JUSTICE INVOLVEMENT

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SUMMARY
This paper explores and identifies the causes and contributors to veterans’ involvement in the criminal justice system from the perspective of a group of veterans with different discharge statuses and demographics.

28 Participants
White 67.9%
92.9% Male
Had their first arrest after discharge 67.9%
39.3% Had 5 or more arrests

BACKGROUND
- Veterans are 8% of the national prison & jail population
- It is expected that the rate of incarcerated veterans will increase
- High risk for homelessness and poverty upon release
- At least half of incarcerated veterans have at least one mental health concern
- 40% have PTSD
- Jails & prisons are not set up to address these issues
- High risk for recidivism, especially if substance use problems exist
- Most common and well documented correlate for criminal justice involvement: alcohol and drug use problems

FINDINGS
Three prominent factors that lead to involvement with the criminal justice system emerged in the analysis.

Alcohol and Drug Use
- 24 participants discussed alcohol or drug use as a major contributor
- Four conditions that give context to their substance use:
  1. Pre-existing problematic substance use ~ 4 participants
  2. Trauma during military service ~ 7 participants
  3. Interpersonal stress ~ 5 participants
  4. Poor coping with adjustment to civilian life ~ 23 participants

Difficulty adjusting after military service
- 27 participants reported having difficulty adjusting after service
- 5 participants identified difficulty adjusting as the direct cause of their criminal justice involvement
- Adjusting to civilian life was hardest for people who could not find meaningful work or yearned for the structure and accountability inherent in the military
- Study participants identified a mindset that is developed during service that is hard to change after discharge

Economic disadvantage
- 9 participants
- Veteran attribute their criminal justice involvement to being homeless, without work or resources, or generally unable to pay bills and manage financial affairs