Diabetes, cancer and obesity are commonly discussed maladies that plague minority communities. However, mental illness in general and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), in particular, are gaining traction in garnering media attention, especially as they relate to higher incidences among members of the military.

There is a steady stream of information and statistics that demand our attention as family members, healthcare providers, co-workers, friends and even neighbors. It is vitally important to understand the dynamics of mental illness, recognize the signs and symptoms as potential precursors and be able to advise or guide the sufferer in the most compassionate ways possible. The statistics are staggering, the myths are abundant and, for many, the notion of seeking help is intimidating.

Whether members of the military or civilian sector, the fact remains that mental illness, in the form of PTSD, impacts an overwhelming segment of the general population but more aggressively effecting members of minority communities. Simply living in highly stressed, at times, violent and poverty stricken urban areas can often boost one’s predisposition to PTSD. With less access and availability to mental health services, prevention and treatment can be stifled.

Current research indicates that one in three veterans is diagnosed with PTSD. An estimated 7.8 percent of all Americans will experience some form of PTSD during the course of their lifetime according to the same research. The 2009 study indicated that African Americans were 20 percent more likely to admit to experiencing mental distress than non-Hispanic Whites. Surprisingly, non-Hispanic Whites are twice as likely to be prescribed and use antidepressant drugs as non-Hispanic African Americans. Women, particularly vulnerable, are twice as likely as men to suffer from the disorder. Of adults between the ages of 18-54, 3.6 percent or 5.2 million people have experienced PTSD in some form during the course of a given year. Yet research suggests that less than one half of people with serious mental illness ever receive treatment.

Myths abound surrounding PTSD and mental illness in general. Mental health sufferers are violent and unpredictable is a widely held myth. The reality, however, is that they are no more violent than anyone else. In fact, less than five percent of violent crimes or acts are committed by people with mental illness but they are over ten times more likely than the general population to be victimized. The notion that anyone will go unimpacted by mental illness is yet another myth. A study conducted in 2011 revealed that one in five American adults has dealt with or is dealing with mental health issues on some level. Major depression has been a complaint of one in ten young Americans. Further, one in twenty individuals have, at some point lived with schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, or major depression.

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder in men can stem from childhood neglect, physical abuse, combat exposure, or any number of other significant traumatic
An estimated 7.8% of all African Americans will experience PTSD in the course of their lifetime.