

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Association Between Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and Primary Care Provider-Diagnosed Disease Among Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans

Andersen, J., Wade, M., Possemato, K., & Ouimette, P. (2010). Association between posttraumatic stress disorder and primary care provider-diagnosed disease among Iraq and Afghanistan veterans. *Psychosomatic Medicine*, 72(5), 498-504. doi:10.1097/PSY.0b013e3181d969a1

SUMMARY: The Veterans Hospital's Association (VHA) administrative records of 4,416 OIF/OEF Veterans using the upstate New York Veterans Affairs (VA) healthcare system were analyzed to determine if a diagnosis of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) was associated with primary care provider-diagnosed physical disease in the first 5 years postdeployment. Veterans with a diagnosis of PTSD were at elevated risk of early-onset primary care providers (PCP)-diagnosed hypertensive, circulatory, digestive, nervous system, and musculoskeletal disease.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Veterans with a diagnosis of PTSD were at elevated risk of early-onset PCP-diagnosed hypertensive, circulatory, digestive, nervous system, and musculoskeletal disease.
- PTSD is a unique contributor to disease even after controlling factors known to have a significant impact on physical disease onset and severity (e.g., depressive and substance use disorders).
- This wide range of health outcomes associated with PTSD is apparent in multiple body systems within a relatively short time period after diagnosis.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer classes for Service members with PTSD about wellness, healthy nutrition, and exercise
- Provide workshops that have family-based educational experiences for Service members with PTSD encouraging families to work together to build and sustain healthy habits
- Disseminate information regarding the negative impact PTSD can have on Service members physical health outcomes

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend the development of partnerships between mental health professionals and those in primary care to provide collaborative care for Service members with PTSD
- Recommend professional education for community providers regarding the common physical health conditions among Service members with PTSD, in hopes that early detection of problems may prevent the development of long-term disabling conditions
- Continue to support programs that assess and provide service to Service members coping with PTSD symptoms

This product is the result of a partnership funded by the Department of Defense between the Office of Military Community and Family Policy and the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture through a grant/cooperative agreement with The University of Minnesota.



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METHODS

- OEF/OIF Veterans who sought primary care treatment within the Upstate New York VA Healthcare network from 9/11/2001-12/31/2007 were identified in an administrative database.
- Participants were followed from their first visit during this period until the study end date and their demographic characteristics, mental (depression, PTSD and substance abuse), and medical diagnoses were extracted from the database.
- Regression analyses assessed the time from the initial medical visit to PCP-assigned disease diagnosis according to PTSD status.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants included 4,416 OEF/OIF Veterans (89% male).
- There were 68% participants who were 20-29 years old, 18% 30-39, 48% single/never married, 38% married, 9% divorced.
- The demographic composition of the participants included: 85% White, 8% Black, and 3% Latino.
- Participants represented different branches of the military including: 67% Army, 16% Marine, 9% Navy, 8% Air Force, and 53% Active Duty.

LIMITATIONS

- Results are not generalizable to Veterans who are not enrolled in the VA upstate New York healthcare system.
- ICD-9 medical diagnoses may be overdiagnosed or misclassified; PTSD may be underdiagnosed.
- Unmeasured variables may have influenced these findings.
- This study can not determine causation.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine whether empirically supported treatments for PTSD positively affect the health status of returning Veterans
- Replicate these results in a larger and more representative sample of Service members, Veterans and/or civilians
- Explore whether early identification and treatment of PTSD symptoms reduces Service members risk for other negative health outcomes

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