Associations Between PTSD and Intimate Partner and Non-Partner Aggression Among Substance Using Veterans in Specialty Mental Health


SUMMARY: A randomized control trial that examined the associations between probable posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), heavy drinking, marijuana use, cocaine use, and partner and non-partner perpetration was conducted. Over 800 substance using Veterans responded to a survey assessing physical and injury aggression, as well as past-month substance use, probable PTSD, and probable depression. Results suggest that there are some associations between violence perpetration and Veterans with probable PTSD.

KEY FINDINGS:
- Veterans with probable PTSD were more likely to have reported past-year, non-partner physical aggression and non-partner injury aggression.
- Probable PTSD among Veteran participants was not significantly associated with partner physical or partner injury violence after adjustment for other variables.
- Cocaine and heavy drinking among participants were independently associated with non-partner aggression.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:
Programs could:
- Disseminate information regarding possible warning signs of interpersonal violence to professionals working with Service members and their families
- Engage Service members in classes that aim to increase communication and decrease physical or verbal aggression
- Continue providing training opportunities for professionals working with Service members with substance abuse to learn more about prevention of interpersonal aggression

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:
Policies could:
- Continue support for programs that specifically address experiences of Service members and their partners with interpersonal violence and substance abuse
- Build awareness across military branches around the importance of supporting and promoting mental health among returning Service members
- Recommend education for professionals working with Service members and their families around the possible effects of PTSD, depression and substance abuse on aggression

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METHODS
- Participants were recruited from three different clinics in Virginia: a substance use disorder clinic, a substance use intensive outpatient clinic, and a mental health clinic.
- Measures used were the modified version of the Conflict Tactics Scale, PTSD checklist, depression module of the Patient Health Questionnaire, and the University of Arkansas Substance Abuse Outcomes Module.
- Statistical analyses were conducted to examine the associations between PTSD and each type of aggression.

PARTICIPANTS
- The majority of the 810 Veteran participants were male (93%), not partnered (69%), and White (73%).
- About one third of the participants had probable depression (32%).
- The majority of participants experienced at least one traumatic event (83%), and 39% were identified as having probable PTSD.

LIMITATIONS
- The participant sample was drawn from one location in the U.S.; therefore, the findings may not be applicable to other regions or contexts.
- Participants in the study were asked only about substance use 30 days prior to the survey administration; a more comprehensive measure of use may have yielded different results.
- Probable PTSD was determined by self-report, which is not as accurate as a clinician administered assessment.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH
Future research could:
- Investigate what treatments may be effective in decreasing aggression among substance using Service members
- Explore the association between PTSD and different types of aggression among female substance using Service members
- Utilize longitudinal designs to gain a better understanding of the associations between PTSD, depression, substance use and interpersonal violence

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS

Design

Methods

Limitations

For more information about the Assessing Research that Works rating scale visit: https://reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu/content/assessing-research-that-works