

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

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

Buchholz, K. R., Bohnert, K. M., Sripada, R. K., Rauch, S. A., Epstein-Ngo, Q. M., & Chermack, S. T. (2017). Associations between PTSD and intimate partner and non-partner aggression among substance using veterans in specialty mental health. *Addictive Behaviors*, 64. 194-199. doi:10.1016/j.addbeh.2016.08.039

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

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