

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

PTSD and Depression Symptoms are Associated With Binge Eating Among US Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans

Hoerster, K. D., Jakupcak, M., Hanson, R., McFall, M., Reiber, G., Hall, K. S., & Nelson, K. M. (2015). PTSD and depression symptoms are associated with binge eating among US Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans. *Eating Behaviors*, 17, 115-118. doi:10.1016/j.eatbeh.2015.01.005

SUMMARY: Veterans who served in either Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) or Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) presenting at a post-deployment clinic participated in a study to examine the association of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression symptoms with binge eating. Veterans who met depression and PTSD screening criteria were more likely to meet binge eating screening criteria.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Meeting depression and PTSD screening criteria was significantly associated with increased odds of meeting binge eating screening criteria.
- Similarly, both depression and PTSD symptoms were significantly associated with binge eating.
- Thirty-eight percent of the participants met screening criteria for PTSD, 16% met screening criteria for depression, and 8% met binge eating criteria.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide education for individuals who may be using food to cope with negative emotions and offer more healthy strategies of dealing with anxiety and depression
- Disseminate information on issues related to binge eating in classes on managing trauma reactions and depression
- Create a list of local referrals for eating disorders for Service members and their families

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Screen Service members for eating disorders at all stages of the deployment cycle, especially during post-deployment
- Encourage research that examines specific interventions for eating disorders, particularly targeting Service members with comorbid PTSD or depression
- Recommend that programs incorporate educational information regarding healthy eating habits in their curricula

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METHODS

- OIF/OEF Veterans were assessed at intake in a post-deployment clinic at one Veteran Affairs (VA) hospital; no information was provided about recruitment rates.
- Veterans completed measures of PTSD and depression symptoms and three screening items for binge eating.
- Statistical analyses were used to predict binge eating from PTSD and depression scores.

PARTICIPANTS

- A total of 332 Veterans participated (92% male).
- Fifty-two percent of the Veterans were married or cohabitating.
- Fifty-five percent of the Veterans had some college, 25% completed high school, 19% completed college or more; most participants (64%) were employed and White (73%).
- Among the sample, 75% were in the Army, 10% were in the Marines, and 15% were in other branches.

LIMITATIONS

- Description of the research methods was very brief and incomplete.
- The measure of binge eating was a screening measure and may not have been reliable or comprehensive.
- The study was cross-sectional and any causal conclusions are inappropriate.
- The sample was clinical (those presenting for services) and results may not be generalizable.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Explore the chronology of the emergence of symptoms, specifically whether the mental health issues (PTSD and depression) or binge eating disorder emerged first
- Examine the concurrent treatment of mental health conditions to find the most effective way to treat mood/PTSD and eating disorders
- Examine psychosocial risk factors (e.g., education level, socioeconomic status, etc.) that may impact the relationship between PTSD and eating disorders in Service members

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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