

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Symptom Severity Predicts Aggression After Treatment

Makin-Byrd, K., Bonn-Miller, M. O., Drescher, K., & Timko, C. (2012). Posttraumatic stress disorder symptom severity predicts aggression after treatment. *Journal of Anxiety Disorders, 26*(2), 337-342. doi:10.1016/j.janxdis.2011.11.012

SUMMARY: The authors examine the relationship between specific posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms and interpersonal aggression (verbal, psychological, and physical) among male Veterans completing a residential PTSD treatment program. Results indicate that specific PTSD symptoms and severity predicted aggression at follow-up. Post-treatment maintenance of non-aggression behaviors may be necessary to reduce aggressive behaviors after intensive PTSD treatment.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Veterans reported significantly lower PTSD symptoms immediately after treatment (i.e., at the post-test) than at the pretest, but no significant change in reports of aggression.
- Greater severity of PTSD symptoms after treatment predicted higher levels of aggression at both the post-test and follow-up.
- Specifically, hyperarousal symptoms of PTSD were the strongest predictor of aggression at the four-month follow-up.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer education for Service members or partners experiencing aggression regarding safety planning, emotional well-being, and continued assessment of aggression and PTSD
- Offer support groups to military families coping with PTSD symptoms and to those who are at risk for aggressive behaviors
- Disseminate information regarding the association between PTSD symptoms and aggressions and the resources available to cope

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend continued assessment of PTSD symptoms and aggressive behaviors throughout Service members careers as a way to prevent domestic violence in military families
- Encourage collaboration between DoD, private, and community-based programs and organizations to address gaps in PTSD and aggression screening and services, particularly as Service members transition out of the military
- Continue to support programs and services that identify, treat, and provide long-term follow-up related to PTSD and aggression experienced by Service members

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.



Putting Research to Work for Military Families



METHODS

- Participants were recruited from a residential PTSD treatment program (to which they had been referred by a clinician because outpatient treatment was not effective).
- This study focused on Veterans accessing services through the VA.
- Veterans completed self-report measures of PTSD symptoms and aggression before treatment (pre-test), immediately after treatment (post-test), and four months after treatment (follow-up).

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 175 male Veterans participating in a residential PTSD treatment program (n = 74 at follow-up).
- The sample was primarily White (56%); the average age was 53 years (range 29 to 69 years).
- No information regarding service branch was provided.

LIMITATIONS

- The authors did not include other variables that may account for the association between PTSD symptoms and aggression (e.g., depression, life satisfaction, social support), which may have biased the results.
- Follow-up data was only available for a sub-set of the sample, limiting the power of the analyses conducted.
- The data focused on Veterans in treatment and may not be generalizable to other groups (e.g., women, Service members participating in only out-patient treatment).

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine the association between PTSD and aggression in different groups of Veterans (e.g., younger populations, women)
- Include longer-term outcomes (i.e., one and two years post-treatment) to better understand treatment effects over time
- Evaluate the effectiveness of current DoD programs aimed at reducing aggression and domestic violence in the military

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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