



Intimate Partner and General Aggression Perpetration among Combat Veterans Presenting to a Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Clinic

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SUMMARY: The associations between intimate partner aggression and general physical and psychological aggression were analyzed. In addition, relationships among different types of aggression, posttraumatic stress disorder, depression, and combat exposure were also examined.

KEY FINDINGS

- High rates of aggression were found in this sample with one-third of Veterans reporting physical partner aggression within the last year. More common forms of physical aggression included pushed or shoved partner or grabbed partner. In addition, 91% reported psychological partner aggression, common examples include shouting or yelling and insulting or swearing at their partner.
- Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms were associated with more frequent physical and psychological aggression, particularly among non-partnered Veterans.
- PTSD symptoms reflecting hyperarousal and lack of control were most strongly related to aggression. This association persisted even when accounting for other factors such as depression, combat exposure, and other PTSD symptoms.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS

Programs could:

- Provide peer support groups to Service members with PTSD symptoms who have difficulties with self-regulation and anger management
- Offer programming to partners of Veterans with information and/or skills training on anger management
- Collaborate with Veteran Affairs (VA) medical centers to provide trainings for professionals on the importance of screening of aggressive behaviors among Veterans

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES

Policies could:

- Consider routine referrals for self-regulation and coping skills training of Service members during reintegration periods
- Implement awareness campaigns to increase knowledge of the impact of PTSD on incidents of aggression in families
- Support programming that increases the education of different types of aggression (e.g., verbal, psychological, physical) for professionals who work with military families

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METHODS

- Participants were patients of a Veteran Affairs (VA) hospital system who were recruited as they sought out mental health services.
- Data were collected in the context of a diagnostic evaluation and data were obtained from an interview and self-report measures.
- Statistical analyses were used to examine relationships between PTSD diagnoses and different forms of aggression.

PARTICIPANTS

- All participants were male Veterans (n = 236), who were divided into those who had an intimate relationship in the past year (n = 161) and those who had not (n = 75).
- The average age of Veterans was 53 years (SD = 12) and ranged from 23-84 years. The sample was 76% White, 16% Black, 2% Hispanic, American Indian, or Alaskan Native, and 3% were of another ethnicity.
- Several operations were represented by this sample including Vietnam (63%), Operation Desert Storm (11%), Operation Iraqi Freedom (5%), 5% were in either Operation Enduring Freedom, the Korean War, or World War II; 9% served in "other eras."
- Approximately three-fourths of the sample was Army (50%) or Marines (24%) with smaller groups from the Navy (7%), Air Force (5%), and National Guard (5%).

LIMITATIONS

- Self-reports of physical and psychological aggression may underestimate the actual frequency of aggression.
- The age range in this study was large and these findings may not reflect age-specific aggressive behavior.
- Only male perpetrated aggression was considered in this study, limiting generalizability to aggression in female Service members.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

- Collect data on levels of aggression of Service members before and after deployment into combat zones to better understand any changes in aggression as a result of combat experiences.
- Examine why PTSD symptoms were more strongly correlated with general aggression among non-partnered Service members compared to partnered Service members.
- Explore demographic factors such as age to explain variations in the association between aggression and PTSD among Veterans.

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