



Mental Health Innovations

Updates from VA's Specialized Mental Health Centers

IN THIS ISSUE: **Treating Veterans with More Than One Disorder**

RESEARCH

Study Shows Daily Changes in PTSD Symptoms and Alcohol Use



Researchers learn about the active relationship between PTSD symptoms and alcohol use in Veterans.

days. Data were collected on the relationship between PTSD symptoms, alcohol and drug use, coping and self-efficacy.

Results indicated an active relationship between PTSD symptoms and alcohol use, with PTSD symptoms influencing drinking more than the other way around. Increases in PTSD symptoms were linked with increased drinking within the same three-hour time block on the same day and the next day. However, surprisingly, increases in PTSD symptoms predicted less drinking three and six hours later, with avoidance coping and self-efficacy to resist drinking influencing the relationship between PTSD and later drinking. Researchers also noted that hourly reports may provide more information about other factors, such as sleep schedules which could inform integrated treatments for co-occurring PTSD and problem drinking. The results suggest that therapy will be more effective by learning how PTSD symptoms and alcohol use change within and across days. For more information, contact Dr. Possemato at kyle.possemato@va.gov.

In a novel study led by Dr. Paige Ouimette, researchers at the Center for Integrated Healthcare in Upstate New York examined the relationship between posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and alcohol use. Study participants included 143 Veterans with PTSD from recent deployments in Iraq who also had risky drinking behavior. The study included both men and women. Unlike previous studies, which have used daily or weekly assessments, this study relied on interactive voice response phone surveys conducted four times daily for 28

“Therapy will be more effective by learning how PTSD symptoms and alcohol use change within and across days.”

HIGHLIGHT

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Co-Occurring Disorders



LEARN MORE

Video: “Substance Use and Traumatic Brain Injury: Risk Reduction and Prevention”

National Center for PTSD

EDUCATION

Video on Traumatic Brain Injury and Substance Use Now Available

A seven-minute video, “Substance Use and Traumatic Brain Injury: Risk Reduction and Prevention,” is now available for Veterans recovering from traumatic brain injury (TBI) and their families. The video shows how the brain works before and after a brain injury. Viewers also learn about symptoms of TBI and how drugs and alcohol can make them worse and increase risks for additional injury. The video was produced by the Rocky Mountain MIRECC and funded by the Congressionally Directed Medical Research Program. It can be accessed by visiting http://www.mirecc.va.gov/visn19/education/dvd_tbi_sud.asp.



Video for Veterans and their families explains the dangers of substance use after traumatic brain injury.

CLINICAL-RESEARCH

A New Treatment for Co-Occurring PTSD and Substance Use in Veterans

A pilot study examined a combined treatment for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and substance-use disorders (SUDs). Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) was found to improve “valued living” for Veterans. “Valued living” refers to quality-of-life factors such as participation in family activities, employment, and social relationships.



Treating co-occurring PTSD and substance use with ACT may improve family life and social relationships for Veterans.

Nineteen Veterans with both PTSD, mostly from combat, and problem drinking received the treatment. Nine Veterans completed the 12 weeks of 1-hour sessions. This rate of treatment completion is similar to what has been found in other studies. Although symptoms of PTSD and problem drinking did not change, Veterans reported high satisfaction with the program and improvements in valued living. “Overall, [the treatment] has helped me to be a better dad,” said one participant.

The project involved the National Center for PTSD, the VISN 17 Center of Excellence for Research on Returning War Veterans, Central Texas Veterans Healthcare System, and the Office of Mental Health Services in VA Central Office. A larger study is now underway and will be completed in March 2016. For more information, contact Eric C. Meyer, PhD, at Eric.Meyer2@va.gov.

There are 15 VA specialized mental health centers of excellence which include 10 Mental Illness Research, Education and Clinical Centers (MIRECCs), 4 Mental Health Centers of Excellence, and the National Center for PTSD. The centers share a mission to improve the health and well being of Veterans through cutting-edge science, education, and clinical initiatives. Mental health problems are often multiple complex conditions. Each center addresses a particular mental health disorder, environmental situation or Veteran cohort. To learn more about these centers, go to www.mirecc.va.gov.

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