

## Research Team

### Principal Investigator:

Nazanin Bahraini, PhD

### Co-Investigator:

Lisa Brenner, PhD

### Research Coordinator:

Marie Devore, MS

## Resources

National Center for PTSD web site:  
[www.ptsd.va.gov](http://www.ptsd.va.gov)

Resources for returning service  
members  
[www.oefoif.va.gov](http://www.oefoif.va.gov)

Acceptance and commitment therapy  
web site:  
<http://contextualpsychology.org/act>



VISN 19 MIRECC  
1055 Clermont St.  
Denver, CO 80220

CONTACT PERSON:  
Marie Devore

CONTACT PHONE:  
303.399.8020 x 5611

<http://www.mirecc.va.gov/visin19>

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Experiential avoidance in  
combat Veterans with and  
without post-traumatic  
stress disorder (PTSD)

COMIRB # 10-0159



**CURRENT RESEARCH:**  
**Examining the impact of PTSD  
symptoms on suicidal ideation**

Veterans Integrated Service  
Network (VISN) 19 Mental Illness  
Research, Education, and Clinical  
Center (MIRECC)

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## **Study Description and Background**

Studies have shown that combat Veterans are a population with an increased risk for both suicide and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Other studies have examined how specific PTSD symptoms can be used to predict suicidal ideation and its severity.

Avoidance is one of the central aspects of PTSD, and is often viewed as a direct response to trauma related intrusions, such as thoughts, perceptions, images, memories, and dreams. Experiential avoidance is a general term used to describe a process in which an individual is unwilling to experience certain internal events, (e.g., thought, feeling, physical sensation, memory), and instead engages in actions aimed at reducing, avoiding, or controlling these internal experiences or the situations that elicit them.

It has been suggested that experiential avoidance plays a major role in a number of psychiatric conditions, including PTSD and suicidal behavior.

This study is designed to test a novel method of measuring avoidance of trauma-related material in combat Veterans with and without PTSD, and to compare this novel behavioral measure of avoidance with other traditional self-report measures of avoidance. This study will also examine whether motivation to avoid trauma-related material is significantly correlated with suicidal ideation in combat Veterans with PTSD.

## **Hypotheses, Study Aims, and Short-term Goals**

The current study is designed to extend the use of the Implicit Association Test (IAT) in order to:

- a) examine its utility to assess trauma-related avoidance in combat Veterans with and without PTSD;
- b) examine the degree of concurrence between a traditional self-report measure of experiential avoidance and the modified IAT; and
- c) to examine if the degree to which individuals are motivated to avoid trauma related material is associated with suicidal ideation in combat Veterans with PTSD.

## **Long-term Goals: Putting Research into Practice**

The purpose of this pilot study is to test the idea that suicidal thoughts and behaviors may function as a means to avoid or escape emotional distress associated with trauma-related intrusions in combat Veterans with varying degrees of post-traumatic symptomatology.

Findings in line with this notion have potential clinical implications, and may provide further support for interventions, such as acceptance and commitment therapy. Acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) is designed to decrease maladaptive behaviors that function to avoid, control, or escape aversive internal experiences (e.g., substance abuse, self-injury) by helping individuals accept and be present with their internal experiences.



## **Progress Report**

We are currently recruiting and enrolling participants into this research study.

