An Overview Of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in the College Setting

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Objectives

- General overview of PTSD
- Overlap between PTSD and TBI
- Overview of PTSD in College Students
- Overview of PTSD in Student Veterans
- Accommodating Students with PTSD
- Resources- Colorado, Wyoming, National
How common is PTSD?

- 60% of men and 50% of women experience at least one lifetime traumatic event.
- Approximately 8% of men and 20% of women will develop PTSD.
- Women = 2 x risk
Definition of PTSD

An anxiety disorder resulting from exposure to an experience involving direct or indirect threat of serious harm or death; may be experienced alone (rape/assault) or in company of others (military combat)

www.ncptsd.va.gov
PTSD Stressors

- Violent human assault
- Natural catastrophes
- Accidents
- Deliberate man-made disasters
Symptoms of PTSD

- Recurrent thoughts of the event
- Flashbacks/ Nightmares
- Emotional numbness ("it don’t matter"); reduced interest or involvement in work or outside activities
- Intense guilt or worry/anxiety
- Angry outbursts and irritability
- Feeling “on edge,” hyperarousal/ hyper-alertness
- Avoidance of thoughts/situations that remind person of the trauma

APA, 1994
Duration of PTSD

- To meet criteria for PTSD, symptom duration must be at least one month

- **Acute** PTSD: duration of symptoms is less than 3 months

- **Chronic** PTSD: duration of symptoms is 3 months or more

- Often, the disorder is more severe and lasts longer when the stress is of human design (i.e., war-related trauma)
PTSD is a failure to adapt

- It’s adaptive for people to have strong reactions to a traumatic event.
- If you are being chased by a ferocious dog, it’s adaptive if you run away.
- It’s your body’s way of protecting you.
- Over time we want to see these behaviors decrease. (avoidance)
- PTSD is a failure to adapt because extreme reactions occur even when there is no threat.
Potential Consequences of PTSD

Physiological Concerns

- Physical complaints are often treated symptomatically rather than as an indication of PTSD
Potential Consequences of PTSD

Social and Interpersonal Problems:

- Relationship issues
- Low self-esteem
- Alcohol and substance abuse
- Employment problems
- Homelessness
- Trouble with the law
- Isolation

www.ncptsd.va.gov
Potential Consequences of PTSD

Self-Destructive & Dangerous Behaviors:

- Substance use
- Suicidal attempts
- Risky sexual behavior
- Reckless driving
- Self-injury
"Complex PTSD"

Long-term, prolonged (months or years), repeated trauma or total physical or emotional control by another

Concentration camps          Prisoner of war
Prostitution brothels        Childhood abuse
Long-term, severe domestic or physical abuse

APA, 1994
Comorbid/ Coexisting Problems

Individuals with PTSD are also at risk for:

- Depression and Anxiety
- Substance abuse
- Spectrum of severe mental illnesses
- Aggressive behavior problems
- Sleep problems like nightmares, insomnia or irregular sleep schedules
- Acquired Brain Injury
  - Traumatic Brain Injury
PTSD and TBI Symptom Overlap

- Emotional lability
- Difficulty with attention and concentration
- Amnesia for the event
- Irritability and anger
- Difficulty with over-stimulation (e.g., lights, noises)
- Social isolation/difficulty in social situations
Research shows that among TBI patients who have a memory for the event, they were more likely to develop PTSD than those with no memory.
Psychological problems with College Students

- 38% Depression
- 40% Anxiety
- 9% Non-suicidal self-injury
- 11% Substance abuse/dependence
- 7% Eating disorders
- 15% Suicidal thoughts & behaviors

(AUCCCD, 2011)
Trauma in College Students

- Prevalence of traumatic events 67%-84%
- Rates of current PTSD 6 – 17%
- This is a higher rate than the general population
- College women are at greatest risk for specific traumas such as sexual & interpersonal violence (Smyth et al., 2008)
Read et al. Study (2011)

- 66% students reported exposure to trauma; 9% had PTSD
- 25% reported physical assault; 7% reported sexual assault (11% women, 2% men)
- Most common traumas: Life-threatening illness & sudden/expected death of loved one (1/3 of sample)
Now to make things even more complicated...

A look at Student Veterans
Impact on Colleges & Universities

- Between 1.8 – 2.1 million troops have deployed for Global War on Terror
- 900,000 OIF/ OEF Veterans have separated from active duty since the beginning of war
- 42% seeking care from Department of Veterans Affairs
Student Veterans

- Veterans and military Service Members who are active duty or in the reserves who are enrolled in postsecondary education.

- Over 660,000 undergraduate students are Veterans-- 3% of all undergraduates. (National Center for PTSD, 2012)
Student Veterans

- 215,000 undergraduate students are active duty or in the reserves--1% of all undergraduates.

- Increasing number are using GI (Government Issued) education benefits for postsecondary education.

- 40% of military Service Members were using Veteran education benefits in 2007-2008. (National Center for PTSD, 2012)
Characteristics of Student Veterans

- 73% of student Veterans are male; 27% are female.
- Only 15% are traditionally aged college students (18-23).
- **31.4% are age 24 - 29.**
- 28.2% are between the ages of 30 - 39.
- 24.9% are 40 or older. (National Center for PTSD, 2012)
What will you see?

“Signature Injuries” from GWT:

1. Physical injuries from blasts (burns, amputations, orthopedic injuries)

2. Operational Stress Injuries/ Mental Health Injuries (PTSD)

3. Traumatic Brain Injury
PTSD in Veterans

- Of those receiving VA care, 45% have an initial diagnosis of PTSD. (Kang, 2009)

- 20% of recent Veterans experience PTSD and depression (RAND Corporation, 2011)

- 10 years of combat have resulted in escalated rates of PTSD, substance abuse, depression, and suicide (U.S. Department of Defense, 2010).
TBI due to Blast Injuries

- Armed forces are sustaining attacks by rocket-propelled grenades, improvised explosive devices, and land mines almost daily in Iraq and Afghanistan.

- Injured soldiers require specialized care acutely and over time.
National Center for Veterans Studies Survey

- 1st national survey for student Veterans
- Online survey (all but 4 states)
- 628 student Veterans participated
- Exploration of their emotional adjustment, psychological symptoms, and suicide risk
National Center for Veterans Studies Survey

Results:

- 34.6% Severe Anxiety
- 45.6% Significant symptoms of PTSD
- 23.7% Severe Depression
National Center for Veterans Studies Survey

Results:

- 46% suicidal thoughts, 20% suicidal plan, 10.4% “thinking about suicide often or very often”
- 7.7% Suicide attempt in past
- 3.8% Suicide attempt likely in future
Take Home message

- Large numbers of student Veterans are experiencing significant psychiatric symptoms

- Considerable number of student Veterans at heightened risk for Suicide!
Working with students with PTSD: What is important to remember?
Remember...

- Not every student with PTSD will require adjustments or accommodations

- Others may only require a few modifications (Shea, 2010)
Veterans with new injuries are just developing an understanding of how their disability is impacting their learning.

Most do not identify with the term “disabled”.

Mental health stigma - significant within Military.
Acceptance of Disability Status

- Asking for help and view of their disability is often seen as a sign of weakness.
- Psychological process for accepting disability status may take time.
- Student Veterans are also reintegrating into social and family lives while going back to school.
Remember...

- May not yet have a disability rating from the VA, and they incorrectly assume this disqualifies them from receiving services/accommodations.

- Bringing disability services, education, and awareness to the attention of student Veterans is critically important.
Factors impacting willingness to seek services

Non-combat injuries:

- Veterans who sustained non-combat injuries may be reluctant to discuss due to shame

- “I don’t deserve help...my buddy was hurt in combat and I wasn’t.”
Accommodations & Tips for College Students with PTSD
Accommodation Considerations

Veteran integrating into care within VA

- It can take **months** for Veterans to get appointments at VA
- Especially disability evaluation and therapy appointments
- Flexibility from professors due to these reasons will reduce stress
- These appointments are important for their care!
Accommodation Considerations

Coping with Stress →

• Additional time for assignments
• Allow students to take a **short break** (5-10 min) during class sessions
• Permit **flexibility** in class session attendance schedules as long as absences do not conflict with core class requirements
Accommodation Considerations

Dealing with Emotions

- Provide education about college counseling services, VA services, and Vet centers to students
- Allow for a support animal
- Allow telephone calls to doctors, counselors
- Encourage the student to walk away & take a break if an unhealthy interaction is occurring
Accommodation Considerations

Panic Attacks

• Allow for a break or place to go to use relaxation techniques or contact a support person

• Identify and remove environmental triggers if possible
General Tips for Flashbacks

- Encourage them to keep their eyes open. Have them look around the room and notice where they are.

- Remind the student where they are, what year it is, and that they are safe.

- Have them get up and move around if necessary.

- Have them get a drink of water and splash water on face.
General Tips for Flashbacks

- Display calmness
- Provide reassurance
- Orient to present (flashbacks will take a person to the “past”)
- Allow them to take a break, or call someone as necessary
Can students recover from PTSD?
Yes, therapy can work!

- People CAN recover from PTSD.

- Empirically Supported Trauma-Focused Therapies
  - Prolonged Exposure (PE)
  - Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT)/ Cognitive Behavioral Therapy
  - Eye Movement Desensitization & Reprocessing (EMDR)

Keane, et.al., 2006
Identifying PTSD Treatment Specialists

Expert therapists

- Psychiatrists (MD/DO)
- Clinical Psychologists (PhD./PsyD.)
- Social Workers (LCSW/MSW)
- Psychiatric Nurse

They should have specialized experience in treating PTSD.
Resources for Students with PTSD

- Encourage students to utilize their university counseling center (often times free)

- Encourage students to contact their insurance provider for a list of therapists who specialize in PTSD treatment

- Try to find a therapist who specializes in: Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT); Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT); Prolonged Exposure therapy (PE); or eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR).
Key Points

- PTSD is more common in college students and student Veterans compared to general population
- Suicide risk is increased with PTSD
- Accommodations can help reduce stressors improving academic success
- PTSD can be treated successfully
Resources for Student Veterans

- Veteran’s Affairs services: www.va.gov
- National Centers for PTSD www.ncptsd.va.gov or www.ncptsd.org
- VA Health Benefits Service Center 1.877.222.VETS or 1.800.827.1000
- Vet Centers’ national number 1.800.905.4675
- PTSD support groups can be located through VA, National Alliance for Mental Illness (NAMI), or About.com’s trauma resource page
- Department of Health Services- in the blue government pages of the phone book
National Resources for Student Veterans

- Veteran’s Affairs services: [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov)
- National Centers for PTSD [www.ncptsd.va.gov](http://www.ncptsd.va.gov) or [www.ncptsd.org](http://www.ncptsd.org)
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PTSD Resources for Student Veterans in Wyoming

- **Cheyenne VA Medical**
  - Phone: 307-778-7550 or 888-483-9127
  - PTSD Clinical Team (PCT) Outpatient
  - Irena Danczik, MD (307) 778-7650

- **Sheridan VA Medical Center**
  - Phone: 307-672-3473 Or 307-672-3473
  - PTSD Domiciliary (PTSD Dom) Intensive/Inpatient
  - John Slaughter, LCSW (307) 675-3638
TBI Resources for Student Veterans in Wyoming

- Brain Injury Alliance of Wyoming--Casper, WY
  - 307-473-1767 or 800-643-6457

- Easter Seals Wyoming--Acquired Brain Injury Program--Sheridan, WY
  - 307-674-1639

- Wyoming Department of Health--Cheyenne, WY
  - 307-777-7656, 866-571-0944
PTSD Resources for Student Veterans in Colorado

- **Colorado Springs Clinic**
  - Phone: 719-327-5660 Or 719-327-5660
  - Women’s Stress Disorder Treatment Team (WSDTT) Outpatient
  - Nancy Galbraith (719) 667-4406

- **Grand Junction VA Medical Center**
  - Phone: 970-242-0731 Or 866-206-6415
  - PTSD Clinical Team (PCT) Outpatient
  - Heather Martinez (970) 263-2824
Resources for Student Veterans in Colorado

- VA Eastern Colorado Health Care System (ECHCS)
  - Phone: 303-399-8020

- Women’s Stress Disorder Treatment Team (WSDTT) Outpatient
  - David Kartchner (303) 399-8020 X 3243

- PTSD Residential Rehabilitation Program (PRRP)
  - Intensive/Inpatient
  - Renee Labor, LCSW (303) 399-8020 X 3890
Internet Resources for Students with PTSD

- Sidran Institute Help Desk- find therapists who specialize in trauma treatment (410) 825-8888
- Anxiety and Depression Association of American- finds therapists by location and mental health disorder
- EMDR International Association finds professionals who provide EMDR
Internet Resources for Students with PTSD

- American Psychological Association (find a therapist)
- Psychology Today (find a therapist)
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) offers a mental health services locator by location and type of facility (inpatient, outpatient, residential)
Hotline Resources for College Students

- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline
  - 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255)

- Treatment Referral Hotline (Substance Abuse)
  - 1-800-662-HELP (1-800-662-4357)

- National Sexual Assault Hotline
  - 1-800-656-HOPE (1-800-656-4673)
Questions?

Thank You

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