PTSD and Depression Symptoms are Associated with Binge Eating Among US Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans.


332 Veterans who served in either Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) or Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) presenting at a post-deployment clinic participated in a study to examine the association of PTSD and depression symptoms with binge eating. Veterans who met depression and PTSD screening criteria were more likely to meet binge eating screening criteria.

Key Findings:

- Meeting depression and PTSD screening criteria was significantly associated with increased odds of meeting binge eating screening criteria.
- Similarly, both depression and PTSD symptoms were significantly associated with meeting binge eating screening criteria.
- 38% of the participants met screening criteria for PTSD, 16% met screening criteria for depression, and 8% met binge eating criteria.

Implications for Programs:

- Programs could provide education for individuals who may be using food to cope with negative emotions and offer more healthy strategies of dealing with anxiety and depression.
- Programs could include information on issues related to binge eating in classes on managing trauma reactions and depression.
- Programs could assemble and make available a list of local referrals for eating disorders.

Implications for Policies:

- Policies could screen Service members for eating disorders post-deployment.
- Policies could allocate funding to develop Veteran specific interventions for eating disorders, particularly targeting Veterans with comorbid PTSD or depression.
- Policies could recommend that programs incorporate educational information regarding healthy eating habits in their curricula.

Avenues for Future Research:

- Future research could explore the chronology of the emergence of symptoms, specifically whether the mental health issues (PTSD and depression) or binge eating disorder emerged first.
- Additional studies could explore the concurrent treatment of mental health conditions to find the most effective way to treat mood/PTSD and eating disorders.
- Future research could examine possible helpful adaptations of established treatments for eating disorders to meet the unique needs of Veterans.
OIF/OEF Veterans were assessed at intake in a post-deployment clinic at one VA hospital; no information was provided about recruitment rates.

Veterans completed measures of PTSD and depression symptoms and 3 screening items for binge eating.

Separate logistic regressions predicted binge eating from PTSD and depression scores.

332 Veterans participated (92% male).

52% of the Veterans were married or cohabitating.

55% of the Veterans had some college, 25% completed high school, 19% completed college or more. 64% were employed.

75% were in the Army, 10% Marines, 15% other.

Racial/ethnic composition: 73% White, 10% African American, 18% other.

Description of the research methods was very brief and incomplete.

The measure of binge eating was a screening measure and may not have been reliable or comprehensive.

All measures were self-reported.

The study was cross-sectional and any causal conclusions are inappropriate.

The sample was clinical (those presenting for services) and results may not be generalizable.

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**Assessing Research that Works**

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