Sleep Variability in Military-related PTSD: A Comparison to Primary Insomnia and Health Controls


45 Operation Enduring Freedom, Iraqi Freedom, and Operation New Dawn Veterans seeking treatment for PTSD and sleep problems were compared to 25 patients with primary insomnia and 27 healthy controls to examine differences in sleep patterns. Sleep symptoms in Veterans with PTSD were more variable across nights and less consistent across patients relative to sleep symptoms in insomnia patients without PTSD.

Key Findings:

- Veterans with PTSD had more sleep complaints, worse sleep quality, and greater night to night inconsistency than comparison individuals.
- Veterans with PTSD had more insomnia symptoms and lower sleep efficiency than patients with primary insomnia.
- Veterans with PTSD did not differ in mean sleep scores from the primary insomnia group.

Implications for Programs:

- Programs serving Veterans with PTSD could incorporate information in their curricula about ways to improve the quality of sleep.
- Programs could create a list of local referrals to treat sleep problems.
- Programs could offer classes that teach relaxation techniques.
- Programs could offer families strategies for helping their Veterans improve the quality of their sleep.

Implications for Policies:

- Policies could recommend screening all returning Service members for insomnia.
- Policies could allocate funding to hire experts in sleep issues to facilitate accurate diagnosis and proper treatment of sleep issues among military personnel.
- Policies could recommend review of work schedules for Service members, ensuring they have adequate time away from their duty station to get sufficient sleep.

Avenues for Future Research:

- Future research could measure both intra- and inter-individual variability in sleep across the course of a study.
- Additional studies could assess the impact of treatments for insomnia, comparing PTSD and insomnia groups.
- Future research could examine the role of physical activity and exercise in sleep among Veterans with PTSD.
Active Duty Service members and Veterans seeking care for PTSD and sleep problems were recruited.

Patients with primary insomnia and healthy controls were taken from separate studies to match the PTSD sample according to age.

Participants had a structured clinical interview for psychiatric diagnoses, completed sleep diaries, had formal sleep testing, and completed questionnaires.

Daily sleep assessments were compared among the three groups (PTSD, insomnia, controls).

97 people participated (76% male).

Average age = 34.00 years (SD=8.50 years).

38% were Veterans, 5% were Active Duty, 3% were Reserves.

Education level: 49% college or higher, 33% some college, 17% high school graduate.

Racial/ethnic composition: 70% Caucasian, 15% African American, 6% Asian.

The two groups of patients were not matched on several key variables (e.g., education, race) which may have biased results.

The study was correlational and causal conclusions cannot be drawn.

The groups were not of equal size which may have impacted the results.

Research Design and Sample

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Research Methods

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Limitations

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Implications

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☐ Not applicable because authors do not discuss implications