

Title:

Trauma, PTSD, and Substance Abuse

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Conclusion:

This article compares 17 selected abstracts, analyzing the relationship between PTSD and substance abuse. It divides the research into five categories and spends the majority of space detailing three of these categories- substance abuse problems in individuals with PTSD, trauma and PTSD symptoms in substance abuse patients, and "self-medication" and prediction to substance abuse based on several trauma related factors.

Purpose:

Although substance abuse is a common disorder among individuals suffering from PTSD, little is actually known about the comorbidity of these two disorders. Theories and clinical experience are available, but little empirical research is available to support them. Many studies examine substance use as secondary to trauma, PTSD, and other related disorders. This issue of the PTSD Research Quarterly provides an overview of selected abstracts related to the prevalence of PTSD and substance abuse comorbidity using the following analytical framework: a) substance abuse problems in individual with PTSD, b) trauma and PTSD symptoms in substance abuse patients, c) "self-medication" and prediction for substance abuse based on several trauma related factors, d) moderating variable, and e) symptom overlap. Studies using both epidemiologic and clinical samples are reviewed and compared.

Findings:

Studies have consistently found a high prevalence of substance abuse in veterans seeking treatment for PTSD. Although there is some question whether this statistic may be influenced by selection bias, since problems with substance use may increase the likelihood of individuals with PTSD seeking treatment in general, data from epidemiological and clinical studies of veterans support the high prevalence of substance use disorders associated with PTSD). In the general population, substance users reported having experienced more trauma than non-users. Included are several clinical studies of sexual abuse victims that suggest increased incidence of substance abuse. Opiate and cocaine users reported the greatest prevalence of traumas, and even without trauma exposure, opiate use among women was a risk factor for PTSD

Many studies of substance abuse and PTSD comorbidity have assumed that PTSD is the primary disorder and that the substances are used to "self medicate" symptoms. A number of studies have yielded conflicting data on this topic. Several suggest that PTSD and substance abuse have concurrent onset, other studies suggest that the two emerged simultaneously and followed a relatively parallel course over time, and other studies failed to find a relationship between self medication and PTSD or even between combat exposure and drug use. Potential moderators for

this self-medication model are individual differences in sociodemographics, treatment and family history for substance use and anxiety disorders.

Implications for Prevention:

Due to the conflicting nature of the available research, additional work is needed. However, this research must be specific and comprehensive, involving both laboratory and field studies, in order to advance the understanding of the relationship between PTSD and substance use. To contribute new and helpful information, such studies must control for specific features of the population, trauma, PTSD and substance use patterns.

Summary Provided By:

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