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Veterans Health Administration
Boston Healthcare System

News Release

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Intimate Partner Violence Increases Risks for Mental Health Conditions

BOSTON – Those who experienced intimate partner violence, or IPV, are at increased risk for mental health conditions, according to research published Thursday, Feb. 10, by VA Boston Healthcare System researchers in the *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma*.

“A better understanding of IPV’s effect on health and functioning is needed to tell us how we can best assess and care for our Veterans,” said Sahra Kim, a research fellow at VA Boston HCS with the VA Translational Research for Traumatic Brain Injury and Stress Disorders, known as TRACTS, and first author of the study.

IPV, including physical aggression, psychological aggression, sexual violence and stalking by an intimate partner, is common among both civilians and Veterans. The study included 813 post-9/11 men and women Veterans who underwent a comprehensive assessment with TRACTS.

Results showed that approximately 38 percent of female and 22 percent of male Veterans experienced IPV throughout their lifetime. Those with IPV experience had significantly greater prevalence of traumatic brain injury, pain symptoms, and mental health conditions, including PTSD, depression and substance use. Additionally, having a lifetime IPV experience, PTSD, mood disorder, and pain symptoms were linked with problems in daily life and disability in Veterans, but the effect was notably larger for women.

“We should use the knowledge gained from TRACTS regarding combat-related TBI and the co-occurrence of physical and psychological trauma to help those who experience IPV to develop emotional regulation and problem-solving skills to improve their daily function,” said Dr. Catherine Fortier, deputy director of TRACTS, assistant professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, and senior author of the study. “Treatments that address the clinical complexity of exposure to trauma, such as the STEP-Home skills-based workshop that is helpful in treating combat-related TBI and commonly co-occurring psychiatric disorders, could expand evidence-based treatments for IPV.”

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The paper is available on the Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma website at

<https://www.tandfonline.com/eprint/JAHKH24TTGKGHRPCWRCP/full?target=10.1080/10926771.2022.20387>

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About the VA Translational Research for Traumatic Brain Injury and Stress Disorders: TRACTS is a VA Office of Rehabilitation Research and Development National Center for TBI Research. The center's purpose is to understand the effects of physical trauma, such as traumatic brain injury, or TBI, and psychological trauma, such as posttraumatic stress disorder, or PTSD, on the brain. The goal is to develop better treatment options returning Veterans with TBI and PTSD. More information about TRACTS is available at <https://www.va.gov/boston-health-care/research/the-translational-research-center-for-tbi-and-stress-disorders-tracts/>

About VA Boston Healthcare System: The VA Boston HCS consists of main campuses in Brockton, Jamaica Plain and West Roxbury, Mass., with VA outpatient clinics in Lowell, Quincy, Framingham, Plymouth and Boston. The system offers comprehensive healthcare and services, including primary care, mental health, vision care, surgery, rehabilitation services, oncology and diagnostic imaging, as well as emergency services, pharmacy, long-term care and a spinal cord injury unit. VA Boston HCS also hosts the Behavioral Science and Women's Health Sciences divisions of the National Center for PTSD, and a research center of excellence in PTSD and traumatic brain injury. The West Roxbury campus serves as the principal tertiary inpatient medical center for VA New England. Together, VA Boston HCS facilities care for more than 60,000 Veterans from the greater Boston area and across New England. More information about VA Boston HCS is available at <https://www.va.gov/boston-health-care/>