

Treating Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in Iraq/Afghanistan Veterans

1 July 2010, By Carolyn Pennington

(PhysOrg.com) -- A psychiatry professor at the UConn Health Center is comparing two treatment approaches for PTSD.

Researchers at the UConn Health Center are conducting a study comparing two treatments for [post-traumatic stress disorder](#) (PTSD) and problems with anger in men who served in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.

Julian Ford, associate professor of psychiatry, an expert on PTSD, is the principal investigator. The study is funded by the U.S. Department of Justice.

More than 13,000 men and women from Connecticut have served in the military in Afghanistan and Iraq, of whom approximately 85 percent are men.

Based on national studies, up to 40 percent of those men will develop a PTSD, and at least half of those individuals will have problems with anger. That means as many as 2,500 or more male Connecticut military personnel or veterans may require help with PTSD and problems with anger after returning home.

“We know that PTSD interferes with all important walks of life for returning [military personnel](#), particularly due to problems with anger,” says Ford, “but with timely and effective treatment these problems can be overcome.”

A recent study found that more than half of the veterans diagnosed with moderate to severe PTSD symptoms reported at least one act of aggression in the previous four months (versus 20 percent of the veterans with mild or no PTSD symptoms), and one in three reported having threatened someone with violence (versus one in 10 with mild or no PTSD symptoms).

“Psychotherapies that have been found to be effective in treating PTSD in the past now need to

be tested with returning Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom personnel and veterans,” Ford says, “so these men can resume their lives without going through years of suffering, as too many military veterans have in the past.”

The study will test the efficacy of a widely used PTSD [psychotherapy](#), known as Prolonged Exposure (PE), and a newer PTSD psychotherapy designed to enhance skills for managing anger and other emotions — Trauma Affect Regulation: Guide for Education and Therapy (TARGET).

PE teaches stress management skills and helps the person to resolve the troubling memories that occur in PTSD. TARGET explains how the body’s stress reactions can be adjusted with focused and mindful thinking, using a seven-step “FREEDOM” process developed by Ford.

“We expect that both therapies will enable participants to overcome PTSD and the difficulties it causes with anger,” he says, “and the study will test this scientifically.”

Men who served in Iraq or Afghanistan and are troubled by stress reactions and anger are invited to contact study coordinator Michelle Slivinsky at 860-679-2214. Participation involves confidential interviews and 10 sessions of psychotherapy at no cost, at locations in West Hartford (UConn Health Partners, 65 Kane Street) and Farmington (UConn Health Center, 263 Farmington Avenue).

Provided by University of Connecticut

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