

PTSD in Veterans Triggers Wave of Domestic Violence

By Steven Tanner on February 11, 2010 8:59 AM |

War veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are two to three times more likely to inflict violence against their intimate partners, spouses, or families in general, according to research from the Veterans Association. While there is no excuse for battering a loved one, PTSD is a serious injury that many believe has increased in frequency among American servicemen and women due to multiple tours of duty in Iraq and Afghanistan.

And along with the increase in PTSD among returning veterans, so too has the frequency of domestic violence, according to an article published by Associated Content citing the VA research.

PTSD is a clinically identifiable and treatable psychological injury. According to information provided by the VA, a batterer with PTSD can potentially be rehabilitated through therapy and/or medication. If the battering continues after treatment, then an abused partner or family member may want to contact an Illinois family lawyer.

How is post traumatic stress disorder identified? According to information posted on the Mayo Clinic web site, symptoms of PTSD include, but are not limited to the following: flashbacks, nightmares, feeling emotionally numb, hopelessness, memory problems, irritability, anger, overwhelming guilt or shame and trouble sleeping.

About 15 percent of servicemen and women returning from the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have self-reported PTSD, according to an entry on the blog PTSD: A Soldier's Perspective. However, a recent Stanford study suggests that 35 percent of returning Iraq War veterans have PTSD.

<http://chicagofamilylawyersblog.com/2010/02/ptsd-in-veterans-triggers-wave-of-domestic-violence.html>

Information specific to veterans

Women Veterans and active duty military personnel are even more likely than non-Veterans to have experienced intimate partner violence (IPV). Among women Veterans, 39% report having experienced IPV at some point in their lives. In active duty women, 30-44% report having experienced IPV during their lifetimes.

Estimates of IPV committed by Veterans and active duty servicemen range between 13.5% and 58% and these rates have been found to be up to three times higher than seen among civilians.

VA has a number of resources available for those who have experienced IPV. At each VA Medical Center nationwide, a Women Veterans Program Manager is designated to assist

women Veterans. This person can help coordinate all the services you may need related to IPV or other kinds of care, including help with safe housing or shelter.

In addition to the Women Veterans Program Manager, there are other VA resources that can help you. For housing or shelter, contact your nearest VA facility and ask for the Social Work Services department or the VA homeless coordinator (or point of contact). Any of these contacts can discuss what options are available in your area. Your VA mental health provider can also help connect you to community resources related to parenting, child, and family services.

Military sexual trauma survivors are at increased risk of having experienced other forms of violence, such as IPV, in the past and are at increased risk of future violence as well. Also, sometimes assaults that occur in the military are committed by current or former intimate partners. If relationship violence occurred while you were in the military, you can contact your nearest VA facility to speak with the Military Sexual Trauma (MST) Coordinator. Every VA facility has providers knowledgeable about treatment for the aftereffects of MST. Many have specialized outpatient mental health services focusing on sexual trauma.

Resources

The following phone numbers are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. It may be helpful to memorize them in case of emergency.

Call 911

National toll-free 24-hour Domestic Violence hotline: 1-800-799-SAFE (7233)

http://www.ndvh.org*

National Sexual Assault hotline: 1-800-656-4673

http://www.rainn.org*

Common Reactions After Trauma

From the National Center on PTSD

After going through a trauma, survivors often say that their first feeling is relief to be alive. This may be followed by stress, fear, and anger. Trauma survivors may also find they are unable to stop thinking about what happened. Many survivors will show a high level of arousal, which causes them to react strongly to sounds and sights around them.

Most people have some kind of stress reaction after a trauma. Having such a reaction has nothing to do with personal weakness. Stress reactions may last for several days or even a few weeks. For most people, if symptoms occur, they will slowly decrease over time.

All kinds of trauma survivors commonly experience stress reactions. This is true for veterans, children, and disaster rescue or relief workers. If you understand what is happening when you or someone you know reacts to a traumatic event, you may be less fearful and better able to handle things.

Reactions to a trauma may include:

- Feeling hopeless about the future
- Feeling detached or unconcerned about others
- Having trouble concentrating or making decisions
- Feeling jumpy and getting startled easily at sudden noises
- Feeling on guard and constantly alert
- Having disturbing dreams and memories or flashbacks
- Having work or school problems

You may also experience more physical reactions such as:

- Stomach upset and trouble eating
- Trouble sleeping and feeling very tired
- Pounding heart, rapid breathing, feeling edgy
- Sweating
- Severe headache if thinking of the event
- Failure to engage in exercise, diet, safe sex, regular health care
- Excess smoking, alcohol, drugs, food
- Having your ongoing medical problems get worse

You may have more emotional troubles such as:

- Feeling nervous, helpless, fearful, sad
- Feeling shocked, numb, and not able to feel love or joy
- Avoiding people, places, and things related to the event
- Being irritable or having outbursts of anger
- Becoming easily upset or agitated
- Blaming yourself or having negative views of oneself or the world

- Distrust of others, getting into conflicts, being over controlling
- Being withdrawn, feeling rejected or abandoned
- Loss of intimacy or feeling detached

Turn to your family and friends when you are ready to talk. They are your personal support system. Recovery is an ongoing gradual process. It doesn't happen through suddenly being "cured" and it doesn't mean that you will forget what happened. Most people will recover from trauma naturally. If your stress reactions are getting in the way of your relationships, work, or other important activities, you may want to talk to a counselor or your doctor. Good treatments are available.

Common problems that can occur after a trauma

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD): PTSD is a condition that can develop after you have gone through a life-threatening event. If you have PTSD, you may have trouble keeping yourself from thinking over and over about what happened to you. You may try to avoid people and places that remind you of the trauma. You may feel numb. Lastly, if you have PTSD, you might find that you have trouble relaxing. You may startle easily and you may feel on guard most of the time.

Depression: Depression involves feeling down or sad more days than not. If you are depressed, you may lose interest in activities that used to be enjoyable or fun. You may feel low in energy and be overly tired. You may feel hopeless or in despair, and you may think that things will never get better. Depression is more likely when you have had losses such as the death of close friends. If you are depressed, at times you might think about hurting or killing yourself. For this reason, getting help for depression is very important.

Self-blame, guilt and shame: Sometimes in trying to make sense of a traumatic event, you may blame yourself in some way. You may think you are responsible for bad things that happened, or for surviving when others didn't. You may feel guilty for what you did or did not do. Remember, we all tend to be our own worst critics. Most of the time, that guilt, shame or self-blame is not justified.

Suicidal thoughts: Trauma and personal loss can lead a depressed person to think about hurting or killing themselves. If you think someone you know may be feeling suicidal, you should directly ask them. You will NOT put the idea in their head. If someone is thinking about killing themselves, call the Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-TALK (8255) <http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org>*. You can also call a counselor, doctor, or 911.

Anger, aggressive behavior and violence: Trauma can be connected with anger in many ways. After a trauma, you might think that what happened to you was unfair or unjust. You might not understand why the event happened and why it happened to you. These thoughts can result in

intense anger. Although anger is a natural and healthy emotion, intense feelings of anger and aggressive behavior can cause problems with family, friends, or co-workers. If you become violent when angry, you just make the situation worse. Violence can lead to people being injured, and there may be legal consequences.

Alcohol/Drug abuse: Drinking or "self-medicating" with drugs is a common, and unhealthy, way of coping with upsetting events. You may drink too much or use drugs to numb yourself and to try to deal with difficult thoughts, feelings, and memories related to the trauma. While using alcohol or drugs may offer a quick solution, it can actually lead to more problems. If someone close begins to lose control of drinking or drug use, you should try to get them to see a health care provider about managing their drinking or drug use.

Summing it all up

Right after a trauma, almost every survivor will find him or herself unable to stop thinking about what happened. Stress reactions such as increased fear, nervousness, jumpiness, upsetting memories, and efforts to avoid reminders, will gradually decrease over time for most people.

Use your personal support systems, family and friends, when you are ready to talk. Recovery is an ongoing gradual process. It doesn't happen through suddenly being "cured" and it doesn't mean that you will forget what happened. Most people will recover from trauma naturally over time. If your emotional reactions are getting in the way of your relationships, work, or other important activities, you may want to talk to a counselor or your doctor. Good treatments are available.

<http://www.ptsd.va.gov/public/pages/common-reactions-after-trauma.asp>

