

VISN 5 MIRECC Research Abstract

A Randomized Trial of Cognitive-Behavioral Treatment for PTSD in Women Sonja Batten, PhD

Many women are traumatized while serving in the military. A recent study of women who were sampled from the National Registry of Women Veterans estimated that 60% had experienced at least one traumatic event during military service (Wolfe et al., in press). Women also experience trauma before entering military service. Among female Vietnam veterans, 15% reported being abused in childhood (Fontana & Rosenheck, 1997). An ongoing study of Marine Corps recruits found that 50% had experienced childhood sexual abuse (Dixon, Turner, & Caulfield, 1997). In fact, the prevalence of premilitary sexual assault appears to be higher in military than in community samples.

Traumatic exposure can have profound effects on a person's well-being and functioning, and may lead to the development of PTSD. PTSD is associated with a range of comorbid conditions and functional difficulties, including other anxiety disorders, depression, substance abuse, psychosocial impairment, poor physical health, and greater service utilization (e.g., Greenberg, et al., 1999; Kessler, et al., 1995; Kulka et al., 1990; Zatzick, et al., 1997). Thus, PTSD has far-reaching effects on many aspects of military and veteran women's lives. PTSD is also associated with substantial societal economic burden.

The purpose of the proposed study is to evaluate the efficacy of exposure therapy for treating Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and associated problems in active duty and veteran women. We propose to compare a trauma-focused exposure therapy, Prolonged Exposure (PE), with a comparison therapy that focuses on current problems, Present Centered Therapy (PCT). This project is a large, cooperative study that involves 12 sites, one of which is the VA Maryland Health Care System (VAMHCS). This work will significantly expand knowledge about the treatment of PTSD, especially in military and active duty women. Another goal of this study is to enhance the care given to women who receive PTSD treatment from VA and DoD sources.