



Experiences of stress, trauma, and PTSD among U.S. veterans during the military-to-civilian transition



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Background

Trauma exposure and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are common among post-9/11 veterans and associated with long-term impairments in health and functioning.

Despite theorizing that PTSD symptomatology may be exacerbated by stress across the military-to-civilian transition, little research has examined the association between transition-period stress and PTSD severity among veterans.

Question: Are stressors occurring during the military-to-civilian transition associated with PTSD symptom severity nearly two years following separation from military services?

Methods

A web-based survey was administered to a national sample of veterans (n=6480) who had separated from active duty about 90 days prior to baseline, then reassessed at follow-up waves every six months thereafter for a total of four waves of data.

Measures assessed demographics, social support and trauma exposures (multiple measures including Deployment Risk and Resilience Inventory 2 subscales), moral injury (Moral Injury Events scale), stressors (Chronic Life Stressors scale), PTSD screen status (T1&2: PC-PTSD-5) and PTSD severity (T3&4: PTSD Checklist –DSM-5).

Sample responses were weighted to represent the underlying cohort of newly separated military veterans. Multivariable analysis examined the associations between the factors of trauma exposures (including both warfare and military sexual trauma), resilience, stress, social support, and demographics and the outcome of posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms at two years post-separation, controlling for timing of onset of PTSD symptoms.

Results

Veterans reported **CONSISTENT LEVELS OF STRESS** across the first two years post-transition



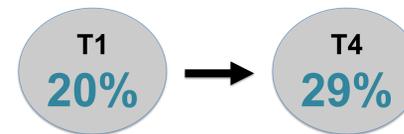
Most commonly reported stressors: PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS



FINANCIAL PROBLEMS



PRESSURE FROM WORK OR SCHOOL



Veterans reporting: **Any TRAUMA during Military Service** **59%**

MILITARY SEXUAL TRAUMA **10%**

NEW TRAUMA by T3 **14%**

Among those reporting trauma: **SCREEN POSITIVE for PTSD at T1** **26.5%**

PROBABLE PTSD at T4 **12.9%**

Regression analysis shows significant association with the severity of PTSD symptoms at T4 for:

Factor	Estimate	SE (beta)	t Value	Pr > t
Military Sexual Trauma	0.9	0.34	2.8	0.0051
War Exposure	0.03	0.00	7.3	<.0001
Resilience	-0.05	0.01	-7.4	<.0001
Moral Injury	0.03	0.00	7.0	<.0001
PTSD positive screen T1	7.6	0.28	27.6	<.0001
PTSD positive screen T2	5.3	0.83	6.4	<.0001
Probable PTSD T3	11.0	0.94	11.7	<.0001
Probable PTSD T4	17.6	0.54	32.5	<.0001
Chronic Life Stressors T3	0.07	0.02	4.1	<.0001
Chronic Life Stressors T4	0.15	0.02	9.6	<.0001
Social Support T4	-0.10	0.02	-6.7	<.0001

Additional non-significant variables accounted for in the model include age, sex, minority ethnicity, marital status, enlisted, health stress (T1, T2), and social support (T1, T2, T3).

Conclusion

These results provide some of the first longitudinal data on stress and trauma occurring across the military-to-civilian transition, with implications for understanding the needs of post-9/11 veterans during this vulnerable period.

Results suggest a cumulative impact of stress and trauma across the military-to-civilian transition on the severity of PTSD symptoms at two years post-separation, with some mitigating effect offered by resilience and social support.

These findings provides impetus for enhanced services to reduce stressors, particularly those related to poor health and finances, and to increase resilience and social support during the early transition period.

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