

Trauma Among People With Substance Use Disorder: The Role of Military Experience

Sergio Martinez, School of Criminal Justice

Introduction

People with Substance Use Disorder (SUD) are also likely to have had a history of traumatic experiences. In fact, trauma is a risk factor for the development of SUD. Many people may self-medicate with illicit substances in order to cope with the symptoms of trauma. The experience of both trauma and SUD is quite common in military samples. Less is known, however, about how people with military backgrounds differ from those without in their trauma and substance use. This study compares people with and without military background on prior experiences of trauma and current clinical constructs. This study will offer helpful insight to practitioners about what factors to target with SUD treatment clients who have military backgrounds.

Method

PARTICIPANTS

- $N = 151$ court-mandated inpatient SUD treatment clients
- $n = 39$ with, $n = 112$ without immediate family military background
- Groups did not differ in gender or racial composition, but military group was significantly older ($M = 39$ vs. 32).

MEASURES & PROCEDURES

- **Independent Variable:** Y/N Military background in immediate family (self, parent, child, sibling, spouse)
- **Dependent Variables:**
 - (1) TRAUMA (type, variety, and extent of prior trauma exposure)
 - (2) CLINICAL CONSIDERATIONS (symptom severity, cravings, treatment motivation, treatment engagement, and criminal risk)
- **Procedure:** Secondary analysis of de-identified data set. Data initially collected through interviews with the treatment clients upon entry into treatment. Chi square and t-tests were performed on constructs above. Significant findings at $p \leq 0.05$ are reported.

Results



Discussion

SUMMARY OF FINDING

- **Finding 1:** People with and without immediate family military background have similar types, amount, and variety of trauma experiences, but those with military background are more likely to have exposure to a natural disaster.
- **Finding 2:** People with military background have more serious SUD symptoms upon entry into treatment than people without.
- **Finding 3:** People with military background are slightly more motivated for and engaged with treatment than people without.

LIMITATIONS

- Small sample of people with immediate family military background, even smaller group with own military background.
- Cross sectional data
- Participants not representative, findings not likely generalizable

CONCLUSION

- Individuals with military background are likely to have different experiences with and reactions to trauma. Trauma and military experience may also relate to substance use severity and other important treatment factors.
- Equipped with more knowledge about how these constructs are interrelated can help practitioners better tailor treatment to unique individuals.

Acknowledgements

- CECH Undergraduate Research Program
- Dr. Sarah Manchak’s Mentorship

