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Study Addresses Postdeployment Anger and Aggressiveness in Veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan Wars

ARLINGTON, Va. (June 15, 2010) — Hyperarousal symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), including sleep problems, irritability, difficulty concentrating, jumpiness, and feeling constantly “on guard” are associated with anger and hostility in soldiers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan.

From interviews with 676 veterans, Eric Elbogen, Ph.D., and colleagues of the VISN 6 Mental Illness Research, Education and Clinical Center and the VA Medical Center in Durham, N.C., identified features associated with anger and hostility, which result in increased risk of postdeployment adjustment problems as veterans transition to civilian life.

Veterans who said they had difficulty controlling violent behavior were more likely to report witnessing pre-military family violence, firing a weapon during deployment, being deployed more than 1 year, and experiencing current hyperarousal symptoms. There was an association with a history of traumatic brain injury, but it was not as robust as the relationship to hyperarousal symptoms.

Veterans with aggressive urges were more likely than others to report hyperarousal symptoms, childhood abuse, a family history of mental illness, and reexperiencing a traumatic event. Difficulty managing anger was associated with being married, having a parent with a criminal history, and avoiding reminders of the trauma, as well as hyperarousal symptoms.

“Most returning veterans don’t have PTSD or difficulty with anger and aggressiveness, but for the subset of veterans who do, this study may help identify related symptoms and other risk factors,” said Dr. Elbogen. “As we learn more about risk factors and how to manage them, we’ll be helping not only the veterans but their families and society at large. Veterans with these adjustment problems should seek help through the Veteran’s Administration so we can best serve those who have served our country.”

The study will appear on June 15 at [AJP in Advance](#), the online advance edition of *The American Journal of Psychiatry* (*AJP*), the official journal of the American Psychiatric Association. Funding for this study was received from the Department of Veterans Affairs, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and the National Institute of Mental Health.

The American Journal of Psychiatry is the oldest continuously published medical specialty journal in the United States and was recently named one of the “Most Influential Journals in Biology & Medicine of the Last 100 Years.” Statements in this press release or the articles in the *Journal* are not official policy statements of the American Psychiatric Association.

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