PTSD Symptoms and Suicide Attempts among Military Personnel

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Hyperarousal symptoms in post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can predict suicide risk among combat-exposed military service members.

Researchers recruited 758 active duty military personnel at risk for suicide to participate in a study investigating whether different PTSD symptom clusters could predict suicide attempts over a three-month follow-up period. They collected information on demographics, PTSD symptoms related to military experiences, acts of self-directed violence, and current suicide risk potential.

The researchers found that the hyperarousal symptom cluster, defined as being “super alert or watchful or on guard” or “jumpy or easily startled,” was a significant predictor of suicide attempts for service members with a combat history at three-month follow-up. That result emerged after controlling for other PTSD symptom clusters, baseline suicide risk, and sociodemographic characteristics.

For active duty military personnel, PTSD hyperarousal symptoms may predict suicide risk. This information can help military-serving treatment teams focus prevention and treatment efforts to help those at highest risk.