Treating Combat Veterans with PTSD: Using Group-Based Exposure Therapy

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DISCLOSURE

- The speakers have no conflicts of interest, commercial support, or off-label use to disclose.

ISSUE AT HAND

- Veterans returning from combat zones in support of Operation Enduring Freedom & Operation Iraqi Freedom are:
  - Often subjected to multiple deployments
  - Resulting in an increased risk for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
  - With limited success using traditional treatment options

Congressional Budget Office. (2012)
MULTIPLE EXPOSURE

- Potential Traumatic Events (PTEs)
  - Combat exposure
  - Norm within military lifestyle
  - Cumulative effects
  - Stress on service members, spouses, children, families, & relationships
  - Risk for acute stress disorder, depression, & Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

[Caban, (2011); Frincu-Mallas, (2010); Price, Ginz, Strachan, Ruggio, & Acierno, (2013)]

POSTTRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD)

- Diagnostic Criteria
  - History of exposure
  - Four symptom clusters
  - Duration of symptoms
  - Functioning
  - Not attributable to substance abuse and/or co-morbidities

[American Psychiatric Association (2013); U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (2014)]
POSTTRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD)

- Major Revisions
  - New class of trauma and stressor related disorders
  - Four clusters
    - Former Criterion C separated into two criteria
  - Three new symptoms added
  - Clarification of symptom expression
  - Removal of Criterion A2
  - Clinical subtype

[American Psychiatric Association (2013); U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (2014)]

GROUP BASED EXPOSURE THERAPY

- Manualized outpatient program
- Group therapy twice a week/three hours a day
- Small group sizes
- Sixteen-eighteen week outpatient program
- Three phases
  - Didactic training
  - Exposure therapy
  - Relapse prevention

[Ready et al. (2008)]

GROUP BASED EXPOSURE THERAPY

- Phase One: Didactic (1-5 Weeks)
  - Group dynamics & stress management techniques
  - Didactic presentations
    - Symptom identification
    - Breathing retraining & grounding
    - Thought stopping
    - Avoidance
    - Member presentation

[Ready et al. (2008)]
GROUP BASED EXPOSURE THERAPY

Phase Two: Group Exposure (8-9 Weeks)
- Alumni sponsorship
- War-trauma presentation
- Interviews
- Recording
- Responses to presentations
- Exposure

Ready et al. (2008).

Phase Three: Relapse Prevention (3 Weeks)
- Imagined funeral for a fallen comrade
- Grief and guilt
- Chaplain and alumni sponsorship
- Relapse prevention
- Certificate of completion

Ready et al. (2008)

Discussion
- Five studies reviewed
- Findings: A positive reduction in PTSD symptoms post therapy
- Two studies: Some clients no longer met the diagnostic criteria for PTSD subsequent treatment
- Two articles: Addressed depression & reported moderate to significant reductions in symptoms
- GBET: A potentially successful treatment in this particular cohort

[Mott et al. (2013); Ready et al. (2008); Ready, Sylvans et al. (2012); Ready, Thomas et al. (2012); Sutherland et al. (2012)]
A LOOK AHEAD

- Group Based Exposure Therapy
- Chronic war-related PTSD
- Clinical Trials
- Adaptability to civilian services
- Pre-deployment preparedness

REFERENCES