



A Brief Overview of Combat PTSD

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PTSD in Military Personnel Who Served in Combat Zones is Pervasive

- Lifetime prevalence among Vietnam veterans is 31% for men and 27% for women
- Current prevalence is 15% and 9% respectively
- However, when you consider “Partial PTSD”, current prevalence rises to 26%
- Lifetime prevalence among the general U.S. population is 5% for men and 10.4% for women



OIF/OEF Psychiatric Casualties

- 19% of OIF and 11% of OEF veterans have a mental health diagnosis—VA
- 35% of OIF veterans were seen by the VA for a mental health complaint within 1 year of discharge
- PDHRAs just prior to discharge showed 5% of active duty and 6% of guard/reserve reported a significant mental health problem. Follow up (3-6 mos. out) showed 27% and 42%



PTSD Criteria

1. Exposure to a traumatic event during which the subject felt fearful, helpless, or terrified
2. Intrusive Recollection
3. Avoidant/Numbing
4. Hyper-arousal
5. Symptoms in 2, 3, 4 were not present prior to the event(s) in 1, and have lasted more than 1 month
6. (See handout in your packet for more detail)



Clinical Presentation

- In early stages, PTSD often presents with intrusive recollection and hyper-arousal
- Avoidance and numbing are probably defenses against intrusion and hyper-arousal and may develop later
- Although partially effective as a defense, avoidance/numbing cause its own problems by cutting off interaction with the world and other people
- Presentations within 1 month of the event are considered Acute Stress Disorder (ASD) and may not become PTSD



Screening for PTSD

- A variety of tools are available at the National Center for PTSD web site: www.ptsd.va.gov
- Primary Care PTSD Screen (PC-PTSD) is a 4 item screening tool, widely used at the VA
- (Copy in your packet and on the web site)



What the DSM Diagnosis Misses

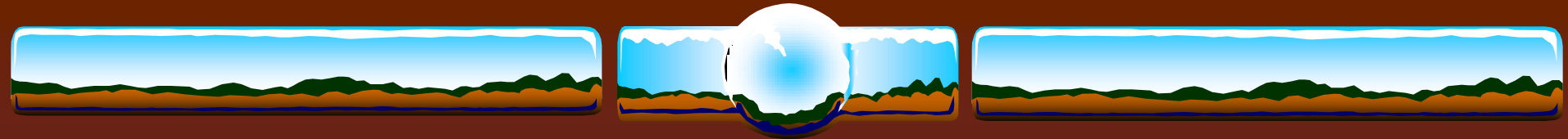
- Some people who suffer from combat trauma do not meet the formal criteria for PTSD: Partial, or sub-clinical, PTSD
- For others who do meet full criteria, these symptoms are not their most serious problems
- Combat PTSD is often a psycho-spiritual problem
- If we do not take into consideration the effect that combat has on the soul we may miss the most important symptoms of all



Combat Trauma's Effect on the Soul

- Alteration in self-perception
- Alteration in perception of the enemy
- Alteration in relationships with others
- Alteration in systems of meaning

(These symptoms taken from DESNOS—van der Kolk and Pelcowitz)



Why Combat Trauma Affects the Soul

- War is essentially a spiritual undertaking that is virtually always justified by transcendent values
- When soldiers go to war, they are almost inevitably disillusioned, especially those who joined for these transcendent values
- In combat, soldiers are constantly put into morally ambiguous situations
- Morality is the foundation for all other values, and combat often challenges the moral values we have been taught